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The Dumb Page; OR, THE DOGE'S DAUGHTER.

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RAJAH," "THE ROCK RIDER," "THE
SEA CAT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BALL AT THE FOSCARI PALACE.

THE waning moon hung pale and faint near the western horizon, and the stars looked down and mirrored themselves in the grassy lagoon, and in the still, deathlike canals of Venice, an hour past midnight. The city was silent as the grave, save in one quarter, near the Doge's pal-

Don Lorenzo watched her till she handed him the tablet, when he looked at it and smiled.

ace, where some of the wealthy nobility lived. There the palace of the princely family of Foscarelli was still lighted up, from roof to water-stairs; and the sounds of soft music within denoted that revelry was in progress there.

The canal in front of the palace was all crowded with long, black gondolas, slender and graceful, the gondoliers lounging on the high prows, and chattering together about the great ball within.

Just as the clock of St. Mark's tolled one, a cavalier came lightly down the steps from the ball-room and paused at the head of the water-stairs, as if searching for his gondola. This cavalier was a very remarkable-looking man, both for his personal beauty, and the stamp of intellect on his face. He was several inches above the middle height; and his close-fitting purple velvet jerkin, slashed and puffed with black satin, and his black-silk trunk hose, displayed the perfections of a form as graceful as that of the leopard it resembled in its motions. The cavalier's face was pale and classically cut, with hair, eyes, and long mustache of the most intense jetty blackness. His hair shone in the light of the lamps like black satin, and his eyes gleamed like diamonds, as he stood there, bare-headed, looking for his gondola.

"Here, my master!" called out one of the gondoliers.

Out of the dense crowd of boats in the canal came a slender black prow, urged by two stout gondoliers, in livery of purple and gold, and glided up to the foot of the stairs, where the cavalier stood.

Then from the low, black cabin in the center a slight, boyish figure emerged, in the same livery. He carried a cloak, cap and rapier in his hands, which he handed to the cavalier in silence.

"Good," said the gentleman, in a voice of remarkable richness and sweetness of tone, that suited well with his elegant person. "Now, Giacomo, forward where thou knowest."

He girt the slight, delicate-looking rapier, with its brodered belt, around his waist; wrapped himself in the great black cloak, and sunk down on the cushions of the cabin as the gondola moved away into the darkness.

"Who's that?" whispered one gondolier to another, as the cavalier departed.

"You must have come from the country, Tomaso," said the other, scornfully, "if you don't know him. Why, that is Don Lorenzo Bellario, the rich Spanish noble, who has broken more hearts, fought more duels, and done more mischief than any other man in Venice, native or foreign. And yet the men swear by him, the women all go crazy after him, and no ball is complete without the wonderful Don Lorenzo."

"But why is this, Giovanni?" asked Tomaso, wonderingly.

"Simple enough, innocent youth," answered Giovanni, sagely; "he is as handsome as an angel, they say; though to my mind it must be one that has fallen; he is as rich as the old Jew banker of the Rialto; he can sing like a whole wood of nightingales, and his skill with the rapier passes any man in Venice. Is not that enough?"

Tomaso did not answer. The countryman's attention was attracted by the movements of a boat close to him, which was passing out to the landing-place, under the exertions of a single gondolier—an old, gray-bearded man, in blue and silver livery.

"What's old Tonio going out for?" he grumbled. "He might wait till his mistress comes out, I should think. And where's Rico, the after-oarsman?"

"Tomaso," said Giovanni, patronizingly, "thou art young yet. Thou wilt learn in time not to criticise the actions of thy betters. Old Tonio serves the Countess Estella Milleroni, and knows what he's about. There's Rico, now."

As he spoke, the companion of the old gondolier, a dark, active fellow, in the same livery, came running out from the porch of the palace, and skipped to the side of the gondola, where he stood waiting, as if for some one.

The next minute, a gentleman and lady hurried down the steps, as if in haste, and the gentleman said, quickly:

"To your post, my good fellow. I will hand in the countess."

Then the gondolier leaped to his place in the stern; the gentleman, who was tall and large, and seemed to be very strong, lifted the lady in, and stepped on board, and the gondola swept off down the canal, with a rapid plash of oars, that formed a great contrast to the silent swan-like gliding of Don Lorenzo's boat.

"Now something's up," said Giovanni, musingly. "Don Lorenzo is up to some mischief,

and the countess is in it. If it was not for Captain Bonetta being with her, I would swear 'twas an appointment; but she wouldn't take her lover with her, if it was."

All the gondoliers were in a little ferment over the two departures, so close together; and their chattering redoubled.

But nothing seemed to be decided, except that the countess's gondoliers had been seen talking to Don Lorenzo's men, trying to learn something from them.

"But that little page wouldn't let them talk," said Giovanni. "Because he's dumb himself he seems to hate to hear any one else talk. I saw him making signs to the men to be quiet, and they seemed to be afraid of him, somehow. It's my belief he's no boy, but some girl of that Don Lorenzo, for no boy would be as faithful as he is. But just as soon as Don Lorenzo appeared on the steps, I saw Rico run across the boats to the palace door. So he must have gone in to tell the countess."

The gossip of the gondoliers was disturbed by the appearance of several liveried servants, calling for their masters' gondolas, and very soon the guests began to stream out, and the ball at the Foscarelli palace was over.

CHAPTER II.

THE BALCONY SCENE.

WE must follow the boat of Don Lorenzo Bellario, as it glided silently on through the winding canals, between tall marble palaces, whose fretted balconies overhung the water, while far above, the bright stars looked lovingly down on the graceful gondola, winding its devious way here and there.

Don Lorenzo was reclining on the velvet cushions of the little black cabin, in an attitude of negligent ease. His handsome, falcon-like face looked perfectly beautiful in the dim light of the boat-lamp, the silky black mustache just lifted by a smile that revealed pearly teeth, as he looked down at the figure of the dumb page, who knelt at his feet.

But a very cursory examination revealed that Giovanni was right in his suspicions. No boy ever looked out of such soft, pleading gray eyes, from under such clustering curls of gold as the dumb page. Don Lorenzo's white jeweled hand toyed carelessly with one of those bright curls, as he gazed down at the pale, beautiful, pleading face of the disguised girl. Her own little hands were clasped imploringly, and she seemed to be dumbly entreating for some favor that the cavalier would not grant.

"It's no use, Annetta," he said, smiling in his lazy, serene way, that made him look so handsome and yet so careless; "thou knowest, flower mine, that Lorenzo would give thee anything in reason, but thou canst not ask him to give up his only pleasure. That would be selfish, Annetta."

The girl wrung her hands, and half-opened her lips, as if to speak. Then a slight change crossed the man's face. His under jaw set itself firmly, and the drooping mustache hid the mouth entirely. He shook one white finger at her, on which gleamed a costly gem, and said, in a low voice:

"Careful, my flower, careful. Dumb thou art, and dumb thou must remain, till I tell thee to speak; or else that tongue of thine will part company from its prison."

And he smiled as he spoke the same lazy, serene smile as before, but with a cruel look out of his great flashing black eyes, that transformed him for the instant into the likeness of a beautiful fiend. The girl cowered before that look. Her pleading eyes filled with tears, but he smiled as serenely as ever.

"There, there, Annetta," he said, stroking her hair soothingly; "I don't like weeping around me, as thou knowest. Life is short. Let it be merry. Love, wine, war, my three divinities. We must be faithful to them, Annetta. Be content that, if I do follow after a fresh face every day, I always come back to thee, my little dumb one, who asks no questions, and wearies me with no complaints. How now—what's the matter?"

He broke off, as the dumb page took up a tablet that hung from her neck by a chain, and commenced writing on it with great speed. Don Lorenzo watched her with lazy curiosity, till she handed him the tablet, when he looked at it, and smiled:

"Do not go to Julia Dandolo. There is danger around to-night. Thou art followed by enemies. Truly, Annetta, thy fears make thee timorous without reason. Enemies? I have none that I fear. Not a bravo in Venice would dare to cross blades with Lorenzo Bellario. To Julia Dandolo will I go to-night—ay, if the whole

Council of Ten, with all their sbirri, were out after me. So cease to persuade me, child, for I am resolved on it. Ay, and yonder is the palace."

As they conversed, Don Lorenzo, glancing out between the curtains, in front, beheld the elaborate Gothic front of a lofty marble palace start up before them, as the prow of the gondola described a great sweep around the corner of the cross canal.

"Put out the lamp, Annetta," he said, in a low, resolute tone; and the girl rose from her knees without a word, and obeyed him.

Then Bellario rose to his feet, threw back the cloak from his shoulders and stepped out into the open air.

"St!" he whispered, and raised his hand.

Instantly the two gondoliers let their oars hang in suspense, and the boat glided along the canal without further effort, the only sound being the almost inaudible dripping of the few drops of water from the blades of the oars as they floated along.

The gondola was abreast of a large building now, dark, heavy and imposing, the flank and rear of the same palace whose white marble facade had greeted them in the other canal. It was one of those immense piles of buildings, that, in the middle ages, contained a family with all its poor relations and hundreds of retainers, and this particular one belonged to the powerful family of Dandolo, who had furnished Venice with her then Doge. Surely Don Lorenzo was tempting failure when he undertook his audacious enterprises against the most powerful family in Venice.

But the Spanish noble appeared to have no fears. The night was dark and still, the face of the palace as dark and as still. At a sign from the master the gondoliers sunk down in their places, and the gondola rested beneath a balcony that overhung a little door in the dark side of the house.

Don Lorenzo dropped his cloak, and caught up a lute that lay on the cushions in front of the cabin. He ran over the chords with all the skill of a practiced musician, in a soft, delicately-fingered accompaniment, and then began, in a low, sweet, tenor voice, that stole gradually on the air at first, strengthening as it proceeded, till a gush of melody ushered in the following

SERENADE.

Starlighted midnight, bright shining on high,
Bends o'er my darling its bright-jeweled sky.
Thousand eyes over thee loving watch keep,
Guarding thy slumbers. Sleep, dearest one, sleep!
Winds from the forest go murmuring by,
Breathing of blossoms and birds in their sigh,
Starlighted midnight thy loving watch keep
Over my darling. Sleep, dearest one, sleep!

Starlighted midnight, watch over her dreams,
Send her sweet visions of soft murmuring streams;
Visions of happiness, visions of love,
Send to my darling bright starlight above.
Send her to dream of all things that bright be,
Grant her one sweet dream to whisper of me,
Dreaming to love me, and waking to keep
All that thou lovest, awake from thy sleep.

As the Spaniard sung the last line, his clear, flute-like voice swelled up into a triumphant burst of melody, and just at the same moment a window was cautiously opened above, and a female figure appeared on the balcony.

Don Lorenzo laid down the lute, and clasped his hands together.

"And is it thou?" he asked, just breathing out the question in his rich, sweet tones, hardly audible except in the intense stillness around; "and wouldst thou come when I sung to thee, sweet Julia?"

"Lorenzo?" whispered down the girl. "Is it thou indeed? Oh! I am so much afraid. My cousin, the Countess Milleroni, she was here to-day. Ah! Lorenzo. She threatened to tell my father all, if I would not give thee up and retire to a convent. I fear to meet thee, even now."

Her voice was low and sweet, but plainly audible to him. He stood on the lofty prow of the gondola, not seven feet below the low balcony, so that his head was close to hers as she leaned down. He uttered a low laugh.

"The countess is very kind," he said, ironically. "For a lady of so much beauty, so many lovers, and so many ducats, she displays a marvelous concern for her cousin's welfare. Does she think the Doge cannot protect his own daughter? If Dandolo is blind, he is no fool yet."

"St!" whispered the girl. "I hear oars."

Don Lorenzo started and listened. The regular plash and roll of gondola sweeps were indeed plainly audible at some distance, evidently coming around the front of the palace.

"Oh! fly, Lorenzo, fly!" whispered Julia, in

an agony of fear. "If they find thee here, thy life is not worth one minute's purchase."

Don Lorenzo turned his head to the large canal in his rear and laid his hand on his sword.

"Not without thee," he said. "Come with me, Julia, and I will go, but not without."

She uttered a stifled shriek for answer. As she looked in affright out to the broad canal in front, the prow of a gondola came rushing round with a rapid sweep, and the next moment the large boat that had left the Foscari palace, so soon after Don Lorenzo, came rushing boldly up the canal, with a dashing ripple under its forefoot, propelled by four gondoliers, two at each oar, bow and stern.

Don Lorenzo flashed out his rapier in a single instant, and Julia disappeared from the window.

But before any action could be taken by the Spaniard, the long, sharp nose of the strange gondola thrust in between him and the steps, the concussion nearly sending him off his feet, when the four gondoliers dropped their oars, and sprang on board Bellario's boat, assisted by five more masked men, who leaped out from the cabin, where they had been hiding.

Don Lorenzo made a desperate lunge at the foremost, and uttered a savage curse as his blade snapped on a steel cuirass, worn under the other's clothes. The next minute he was surrounded by men, who trod as silently as if on velvet, a great black cloak was thrown over his head, and struggling furiously but in silence, the gay Don was carried off in the strange gondola, tied hand and foot, and wound up in ropes, with a dexterity that told that he had fallen into the hands of the professional sbirri or police.

His own gondoliers had not dared to stir a limb, and the girl-page was left in the cabin, weeping.

CHAPTER III. A WOMAN'S SCORN.

WHEN Don Lorenzo was borne off captive, so cleverly, his first feelings were those of unmitigated rage, the more tremendous because impotent. A man of intense pride, who plumed himself upon doing things romantically, and always with success, he had been taken captive almost without resistance, and hurried off packed up in a bag, in a manner at once ridiculous and humiliating.

He lay and bit at the ropes that gagged him, and writhed in self-torture as he thought of all this.

Then, in a moment more, with singular self-control, he lay perfectly mute, and listened intently to find where he was. He could see nothing, but his ears could faintly distinguish, through the muffling cloth around his head, the rumble and plash of oars, that showed him he was moving onward. Several times he heard the sound of low voices above him, but he could not distinguish any words.

So the voyage lasted for some time, till he heard the long-drawn cry of the bow gondolier, that announced that they were coming to a landing-place. Then the rumble of oars ceased, and he heard the wash of the ripples past the boat's side, and the grating of the gun wale as it grazed the jetty.

The boat became still, and he heard the tramp of feet round him, and felt himself lifted up and placed on a stretcher. He was carried off, and knew that he was ascending flights of steps made of marble, from the sharp echoes of his bearers' feet.

On and still on, up and down steps, and around the corners of corridors, till at last he was laid down in a room, and heard the closing of a door as his bearers retreated. There he was left alone for some time.

He had already recovered from his first tempest of rage, for Don Lorenzo was a man of rare self-command. He had begun to speculate on who his captors might be, and to prepare himself to meet the terrible Council of Ten, who governed Venice so remorselessly, when he again heard the door opened, and footsteps approaching on a marble pavement.

He lay perfectly still, when he was seized by two pairs of hands, and felt the cords which wound round him deftly untied, till he was again free. Then the enveloping cloak was removed from his face, and he started to his feet, to find himself in a large and handsome, nay, magnificent apartment, evidently belonging to a palace of some of the first nobility. A blaze of light fell from a large chandelier on the table on which he had just been laid, on the tessellated marble pavement below, on the walls inlaid with colored marbles, and on two figures that stood before him.

One of these was a tall, handsome man, large of frame, and blue-eyed and fair-haired, in the

half-armor of an officer of pikemen, his whole aspect, as well as his dress, proclaiming him one of those sturdy Swiss, who first lit that torch of freedom in Europe, which has burned ever since in their mountain republic.

The other was a lady.

But in saying that she was a lady, we have not said all. She was such a beautiful woman as rarely falls to the lot of man to see—tall, graceful, with auburn hair falling in long plaits below her waist, her robes flashing with gold and jewels. She had remarkably large hazel eyes, and a grave, queenly mouth, that was sweet and dignified at the same time. The hazel eyes were looking into the bold, black ones of Don Lorenzo, with a severe and penetrating look, and Bellario started.

"Countess!" he said, in a tone of surprise, "is it you?"

"Ay, Don Lorenzo," answered the lady, in a low, sad voice, like a queen reproving a subject, whom she yet loved; "'tis I, Estella Milleroni, widow of that brave admiral who gave his life for Venice, when you fought under his flag. Little did I think, Lorenzo Bellario, when I myself, at the Doge's order, bound on your neck the collar of St. Mark, for good deeds bravely done, that the time would come when you would become the byword of Venice for your sins, and that I should arrive only in season to prevent your base attempts on the honor of my family."

Don Lorenzo had recovered all his calmness of demeanor. He looked handsomer than ever, as he tossed back the disordered waves of black hair from his white forehead, and replied with his gentle smile, that just showed his teeth.

"The Countess Milleroni does me too much honor. Not the whole family of the Dandolo. Heaven forefend! That were too much for one man to attempt."

The lady flushed and spoke angrily:

"Dandolo is a tree with many branches. Touch but one twig, and the tree feels it. And you were trying your art on the very daughter of the Doge himself. Should not I, his niece, feel that as an insult? Ay, and I found it out, no matter how, and I have foiled you. To-night the Doge is warned. By to-morrow Julia will be safe in a convent, and you will be warned to quit Venice."

The Spaniard smiled again with light scorn.

"Not the whole Council of Ten dares order me to quit Venice. I hold them all in the hollow of my hand. It was lucky for you that I was not killed to-night or my blood would have brought a dear reckoning to you."

This time the large Swiss officer interposed, in a deep bass voice.

"Not to me, Don Lorenzo."

The Spaniard turned and regarded the other with a cool stare for the first time.

"Ah!" he said, "Captain Bonetta, the Swiss bravo, who sells his sword to the highest bidder. You think yourself safe, gallant captain, but I tell you that my ambassador shall have you broken on the wheel, if you harm one hair of my head."

He spoke with the cool audacity of one insensible to fear, and with a sneering emphasis that seemed to gall the Swiss, for the soldier's cheek flushed, as he said:

"And again I say, I care not for any Spaniard that ever kneeled to a Moor."

It was Don Lorenzo's turn to flush now, for he felt the taunt of his country's being still unable to drive out the Moors. But he replied with admirable coolness:

"I was foolish to speak to you. A hired bravo is too much honored if a gentleman spits on him."

Captain Bonetta made no answer. He flushed scarlet, and his blue eyes fairly blazed, as he looked down at the other. But the Spaniard returned the gaze with a ferocity that left no doubt of his intentions.

"Look like that on the Rialto to-morrow, if you dare, captain," he said, "and I will tame your pride with the same rapier that has pinked five of your comrades already."

Captain Bonetta frowned, but in a moment more he caught the lady's glance fixed on him. The soldier bowed low, drew himself up, and quietly observed, in Spanish:

"I shall be there, Don Lorenzo, at ten of St. Mark's clock."

Don Lorenzo turned to the lady with ironical courtesy.

"You have taken much trouble to-night, countess. More than I thought possible for any one to take, not a member of the Council of Ten. My faith! When your fellows muffled me so dexterously, I thought for certain that I was to be carried off to the Bridge of Sighs to await the headsman's kind offices in the morning. And

yet I might have known, from past experience, that I was certain to wake in a lady's bower."

The countess checked him with grave severity.

"Alas! wicked and impenitent man," she said; "is it only to scoff and deride, that you find yourself saved from death? Had I chosen to send word of your attempt to the Council of Ten, you might now be languishing in the dungeons of the Ducal Palace, instead of scoffing in the saloons of Milleroni. Have you no shame, no sorrow?"

He laughed haughtily, and his eyes flashed fire for the first time. As Estella Milleroni looked on him she realized for a moment what a tiger lay couchant in this man, so smooth and velvety at most times. He smiled as serenely as ever, but the meeting of his brows above the glowing eyes, and the lifted mustache that just showed the teeth, made the smile inexpressibly cruel and sinister, as he said:

"Shame! Yes. That I let you outwit me. I was warned, but I would not listen. Sorrow! Yes. For poor Julia. We might have been so happy, and you have parted us."

"Parted you?" exclaimed the lady, indignantly; "and should I not have done it? Is the honor of an ancient family to be bartered away for a few hours' delusive happiness? Man, man, you are worse than wicked. You are shameless."

He laughed again.

"Well, well, lady fair, you have the advantage this time, but my turn will come, and that full soon; and then, Estella, Countess Milleroni, look to yourself, and all your houses of Dandolo and Milleroni, for as sure as the sun will rise to-morrow, so surely will Lorenzo Bellario have his revenge for this night's work."

His pale face flushed slightly as he spoke these last words, and a scarcely perceptible shudder agitated his frame. He spoke through his clenched teeth. But the countess was a brave woman, and the semblance of a threat warmed her. She laughed in turn with bitter scorn.

"Revenge?" she said, haughtily; "Dandolo and Milleroni alike laugh at any Spaniard that ever yielded to a Moor. Go, Don Lorenzo, safe as to your life, because we despise you too much to take it. Try your arts on those who are foolish enough to listen to you. The house of Dandolo is safe from the attacks of midnight robbers, and mark my words, Don Lorenzo Bellario, the next time you will not escape so well. Try your revenge, but beware of my power, for I can do that with you that you little dream of; ay, put you on the pillory, like a common thief, grandee as you are, and shame you so that you shall be glad to sneak out of Venice like a whipped hound. Go!"

Don Lorenzo's face had been growing paler and paler, as the lady, with flashing eyes and indignant eloquence, scolded him so soundly. When she had finished, his own eyes seemed to blaze in the midst of his ashy face, a drop of blood stood on his under lip, where he had bitten it near through, and his breast rose and fell convulsively. He drew in his breath hard and whispered in a low, husky tone:

"We shall see."

Then he made a low obeisance to the lady, turned on his heel and stalked from the room without another word, to find his own gondola lying in front of the steps of the Milleroni Palace, with Annetta weeping within.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PUBLIC INSULT.

IT was high morning on the celebrated bridge of the Rialto, at Venice, the exchange of her merchants and bankers, the fashionable lounge of her gallants. The gay crowd of cavaliers, vying with each other in their silks, satins, velvets, jewels and feathers, all perfumed and long-haired, with slender rapier on side, was in constant motion. The gallants chattered to each other in the soft, liquid Southern tongue, with the profusion of pantomime that distinguishes the Italians, and discussed all the scandals of Venice, even touching on politics, if they were sure no police spy was near.

Long-robed merchants conversed in sober groups close by; and the Jew bankers, distinguished by their peculiar gabardines, kept in their own little knots, jealously watching and watched by their Christian rivals in trade.

They could see the galleys by the arsenal close by, and the forest of masts on the lagoon that marked the power of the Queen of the Adriatic, in her prime.

Through the midst of the crowd, marching with the steady tramp of the trained mercenary, came a small body of Swiss halberdiers, on their way to relieve guard at the Dugano or cas-

tom-house, and at their head were two officers. The one was in armor and on duty, but the other had doffed all defensive weapons and was only accoutered as a simple cavalier.

He nodded gayly to several acquaintances in the crowd, and left his armed companions, with a whispered word to his brother officer, who passed on as before.

The officer in civil dress was Captain Bonetta. "Aha! Bonetta," cried a curled young fop, "thou art come to make thy excuses for taking away the countess so early, from the Foscari ball, last night, is 't not so?"

"Fore St. Mark," cried another, "this Bonetta is like a dog in the manger with his countess. But a lucky dog, too, to win a widow of twenty-three, with a million of ducats for a dowry. Hey! Bonetta?"

The captain's handsome face clouded slightly. "I beg you, gentlemen," he said, "to leave my lady's name out of the conversation. We Swiss have peculiar notions, which you will excuse. We left last night on a matter of private and family business."

"Aha! a wedding contract to be arranged, I'll lay my life," cried the curled cavalier, laughing. "Well, gentlemen, such matters are sacred to us of moral Venice, for marriage is truly a venerable institution. The only man I ever knew to scoff at it, is that graceless Spaniard, Bellario."

"Ay, ay, where is Bellario this morning?" cried several voices.

"He left last night on *important business*, he said," observed curly-head—"that means, with him, an interview of course. He is such a lucky fellow, that Bellario. Other people may have just as many personal advantages"—here the youth caressed a downy mustache—"but he has such a devilish lot of *experience*."

"Don't despair, Count Lulli," said Bonetta, gravely. "From present appearances you'll be just as wicked as he is by the time you're thirty."

"Do you really think so?" inquired Lulli, simpering, and evidently flattered.

"I really do," said the captain, still more gravely; "and I am sorry for it, Lulli, for I think that Don Lorenzo Bellario is a bad model to follow."

"But he's so devilish handsome," suggested another youth, admiringly; "and he fences so well. Not a man in Venice can touch him. All the women adore him."

"Most women are fools," said the captain, placidly. "I know one woman who does not run after him, and one man who does not fear to cross rapiers with him."

"We shall see if you will say that to his face," said Lulli, half angrily, for Don Lorenzo was the idol of the younger cavaliers. "Here he comes up the bridge."

Captain Bonetta turned his head and perceived the Spanish noble coming up the sidewalk toward their group. Several of the young cavaliers started toward Don Lorenzo, with loud greetings, returned by the other with his charming grace. The Swiss officer folded his arms, leaned back on the parapet of the bridge, and awaited the other's approach, with a proud smile on his own fair face, his blue eyes steadily fixed on the other.

Don Lorenzo was attired in a jerkin and short cloak and cap of yellow satin, stiff with gold, which set off his dark beauty marvelously. His flesh-colored silk hose displayed the volume of knotted muscle in his lower limbs to great advantage, and his step was as light as that of a deer. He was not looking at Bonetta, but scattering his wit among his crowd of admirers as if not conscious of the other's presence.

He advanced close to him, rattling away to the others at a great rate, and then halted, with his back deliberately turned to the captain.

A second party of Swiss halberdiers, the relieved guard at the arsenal, happened to be passing in the roadway below, on their way back to the barracks. Don Lorenzo turned to Count Lulli who stood next to him.

"Methinks," he said, in a distinct voice, "that you of Venice display great lack of judgment in allowing your bravos to roam the streets by daylight."

Lulli looked surprised.

"Why, Lorenzo," he said, "those are not bravos. They are the Swiss guards."

Don Lorenzo laughed musically.

"Why, so they are, Lulli," he exclaimed; "I crave ten million pardons for the mistake. Let me see. Your bravos are hired cutthroats—are they not? Yes, I remember. They will stab men in the dark for a price. The higher the man the greater the price. How strange that I should have taken those fellows for bravos!"

Ah! I remember. It was the look of their faces. Those Swiss hogs all look alike."

Lulli turned pale.

"Be careful," he whispered, "there's a Swiss captain behind you now."

"Ah! a Swiss?" cried Don Lorenzo, turning round with his usual lazy grace, and surveying Bonetta from head to foot with indescribable insolence—"a Swiss, indeed! Well, Lulli, what of it? The gentleman is big enough to cut up into good pork."

The jesting cavaliers had become still as death at the rude words, which foreboded but one result in those days. They gazed with anxiety at the two men, who confronted each other, the Swiss taller by half a head than the other, and larger, but lacking the compact, elastic grace of Don Lorenzo. Bonetta's proud smile was gone. His blue eyes looked fiercely from under bent brows at the Spaniard, as he said, slowly:

"Perhaps you would like to carve me, signor?"

Don Lorenzo laughed again, and looked at the other critically. Then he wrung his white hands daintily, and said, with affected horror:

"Eh! gentlemen, but he would bleed like ten pigs."

A laugh went up at the captain's expense, which irritated him out of his composure so far that he laid his hand on his sword. Don Lorenzo seized the opportunity, for the other had violated the etiquette of duels in Venice. The police were constantly on the Rialto, and motions of anger there attracted their attention.

"Lulli," he said, sneeringly, "your Swiss friend is signaling to the police. He has no fancy to be bled, I see."

Bonetta dropped his sword as if he had been stung, and turned scarlet. He started up from his leaning attitude, and said, sternly:

"If you will follow me to the island of San Antonio, signor, you shall see whether I am to be bled so easy. Will you follow, or are you only a street braggart?"

"Why, lo! you now!" said Don Lorenzo, in his sweetest voice: "our fat friend has waxed warlike, *even in daylight*. He has concluded to try and back up his boasts. Certainly, my valiant captain, I will follow you to the ends of the earth, if such be necessary to cool your temper. Let us go. Lulli, and you, gentlemen, shall we make a little party of pleasure, to enjoy the fresh breezes of the Adriatic?"

And smiling as sweetly as ever, the audacious cavalier picked his way daintily across the street, surrounded by his friends, to where a quantity of large pleasure boats lay moored at the quay.

The island of San Antonio was a desolate sandbank, just outside of the city jurisdiction. It was the recognized dueling-ground of Venice, winked at by the police, who were quite satisfied as long as the city itself was quiet.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUEL.

"WHERE to, signor?" asked one of the boatmen, as they swept the gayly-decorated boat out from the jetty into the open lagoon.

"Anywhere, anywhere, out over the dancing, sparkling sea," half sung Don Lorenzo, as he stood among his admirers, glittering and radiant. It was not the etiquette to mention their destination while it might be overheard from the shore.

The old boatman nodded and bent to his oars, in company with his mates, and away swept the boat, with its brilliant burden, including several boy pages, and Don Lorenzo's dumb servitor, who bore her master's lute with her. As a mass of color the boat would have made a brilliant picture, if a few female figures had been there, but female tongues were to be avoided on such an expedition. Every one was chattering gaily, with one exception, and that was the Swiss captain.

His simple, earnest nature could not treat death so lightly as the mercurial Italians, and moreover he was very angry. The sneers and insolence of Don Lorenzo had raised him to white heat; the more so that he was of a quiet, phlegmatic nature generally, and the very soul of honor and pride. The Don had insulted name and nation, and lashed him to frenzy, feeling his own inferiority in wit and repartee.

He sat in the stern, silent and alone, wrapped in his short mantle, and brooding to himself, while his rival, serene in the midst of his admirers, laughed and jested as airily as if going to a ball.

So they swept on to the entrance of the lagoon, past the Dugano, and out into the sparkling waves of the Adriatic, where the boat's

course was turned to the low, distant sandbank known as the island of San Antonio.

The boatmen rowed sturdily and merrily. They knew that the San Antonio parties always paid double for hush-money. So they strained to their oars till the long boat sprang to the motion, and rapidly swept nearer to the land.

In a quarter of an hour they had rounded the place and run ashore on the side furthest from the Dugano, hidden from sight by the low bank.

Don Lorenzo was the first man to leap ashore, which he did with an active spring that produced a round of applause from his admirers. The rest followed, and clustered around their hero, while the silent captain was left to get out unattended.

This was remarked by Don Lorenzo, who, for the first time since their meeting, exhibited courtesy toward his antagonist. He advanced to him and doffed his plumed cap in a low salute.

"Signor Captain," he said, "I regret extremely to observe that you are without a second of your friends. Had I noticed it before, I should have insisted on your being accompanied by a brother officer. As it is, I feel the great trust you have reposed in my honor, and it shall not be abused."

The Swiss captain raised his own hat with grave courtesy. This was meeting him on his own ground.

"I am content, Don Lorenzo," he said. "You are a bad man, but you are no coward, nor am I."

Bellario looked at him for a moment with a sort of indescribable look, as if he admired the gallant bearing of the other, and almost regretted that he was his enemy. The soft-hearted Swiss marked the look, and his own countenance cleared up.

"Is it too late?" he said, in a faltering voice. "Estella would be so glad if you would but repent."

The Spaniard's brow grew as black as night at the mention of that name. He drew back haughtily.

"Too late, signor," he said; "you should have thought of all this before last night. Are you ready?"

The captain bowed gravely.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bellario, "the man who stands as second for Captain Bonetta is my best friend. Count Lulli acts for me. Who will act for the captain?"

"I will," said several voices, and the matter was at last satisfactorily arranged.

Then the whole party entered a path in the sand-hills that led them to the scene of hundreds of duels before, a little circular valley, surrounded by banks of sand, which yet was kept firm and hard by the constant soaking of the sea-water that came up from beneath.

The providence of former professors of the amiable science of dueling had even provided several benches for the accommodation of spectators, and the combatants at once proceeded to strip to their work.

Each took off doublet and cloak, and stripped as far as his shirt, when the seconds examined for concealed weapons or armor. Both were entirely free from defense. Then their swords were measured and found almost of a length, the difference of a quarter of an inch being in favor of Don Lorenzo.

"It is all one," said the quiet voice of the captain; "my arm is the longest."

The seconds waved back the crowd, placed their men within twenty feet of each other, and then left them to themselves.

Each man was armed with a long three-cornered rapier, and carried a dagger in his left hand.

Captain Bonetta stood on his defense, his tall, manly form thrown into splendid relief as he poised his sword firmly, and stamped his foot twice to gain his ground.

Don Lorenzo gave a whistling cut with his rapier, as if to test its temper, and then advanced lightly to the assault, a gay smile on his lips, a fierce glitter in his dangerous eyes.

The Swiss came to meet him half-way, and the rapiers crossed with a clash.

After that Bonetta halted, the two fixed their eyes on each other with an eager, intense gaze, and the weapons slowly grated together. Don Lorenzo smiled mockingly, and at that smile the soldier lunged furiously at him, with an iron firmness of arm that it seemed no parry could turn.

But the Spaniard eluded the thrust like a shadow, with a single lithe movement of his supple body, and a spring to one side.

Before the captain could recover himself, Bellario attacked him, with the quickness of a flash. Bonetta managed to parry the thrust with a

desperate effort, but the parry was clumsily made and a second rapid lunge pricked him in the arm, just sufficient to draw blood.

His own return was quick and strong, for Bonetta was a tough fighter who had been in many a battle. Again Don Lorenzo leaped back to avoid it, and this time the soldier was ready for him on the return, so that the rapiers clashed loudly.

But after a few ineffectual passes and parries, both of the duelists paused as if for breath, and the Spaniard saw that the blood was slowly dropping from his enemy's arm, just above the wrist.

He took advantage of the fact to irritate the other, for that was one of his tactics in dueling.

"My lady countess would be proud of her captain," he said, in a low, sneering tone, "could she see him bleed under my sword."

Bonetta frowned.

"First blood is not last," he said, pitily.

Don Lorenzo laughed, sardonically.

"You Swiss are easily led," he answered; "I have killed five already, and here goes for the sixth."

With the last word he became in turn the assailant, and developed such a tremendous strength and suppleness of wrist and body as fairly confounded Bonetta.

The bright point of the Spaniard's rapier kept playing in circles around his own, while Bellario shifted round and round, like a hawk waiting above his prey.

The slower and more downright fighter was confused with the other's marvelous rapidity, and content to stand on the defensive, as well as he could.

At last, spying an opening, he lunged out for the lower part of his adversary's breast, and the next moment felt the keen point of the Spaniard penetrating his shoulder, while a mocking laugh convinced him that he had fallen into a snare. His own point tore Bellario's shirt, and grazed his side.

The rush of blood crimsoned his sleeve in a moment, but only increased his anger. He made another great lunge at the Spaniard, and stumbled as the other leaped back to avoid it.

Thud! came the keen point on his right breast as he fell; and then it seemed as if a legion of fiends were tearing out his vitals, as the sharp blade pierced through the lungs even to the back; and, with an irrepressible groan, Captain Bonetta sunk on the sand, the blood rushing out in perfect streams from his two wounds.

His conqueror withdrew his sword carelessly, and smiled as he looked down at the pale face of the other, distorted with agony now. The smile was inexpressibly cruel and triumphant.

"Captain Bonetta," said Don Lorenzo, in a low voice, "this is only the beginning of my vengeance."

The wounded man lay looking up at him, with a strange, sad, reproachful look; but he uttered no word. The Spaniard showed his teeth again with fiendish significance:

"You are not dead yet, Bonetta," he observed, quietly; "I intend you to live, to witness the disgrace of your spotless countess. She took me from Julia Dandolo, so I suppose she wants me herself. I am quite satisfied. I can be happy with fifty, and the countess shall be queen, till I am tired of her. You know how long that will take. Then you can have her. And let me tell you, Swiss hog, that I shall make that woman suffer as never woman suffered before, while you lie helpless and invalided."

And he spat upon the other with a gesture of profound disgust, and turned away to the silent, horrified row of gallants, who were shocked at the last action.

"You look surprised, gentlemen," he said. "Were this man a gentleman, I would not treat him thus. But only last night he was at the head of a band of cowardly masked ruffians, who seized me from behind in the dark and robbed me. Believed to be an officer, he is nothing but a hired bravo, and the Countess Milleroni has been grossly deceived in his character. You saw only the insult of to-day, not the assassin of last night, from whose comrades I barely escaped with life. Had I killed him now, he would but get his deserts."

The Swiss never answered a word. He slowly sunk back on the sand, and his eyes rolled up as he fainted. The Venetians looked at him in horror. There was, in the character of bravo, so artfully given to him by Bellario, something so loathsome and repulsive, that their pity was turned into disgust. The Spaniard availed himself of the feeling.

"He was too much honored by crossing swords with a gentleman," he said, scornfully. "He

has sneaked into good society long enough, without his true character being told. Let him live if he can. You bear me witness that I treated him as an honorable foe, and overcame him fairly."

"Let us go," said Count Lulli, gravely. "The man's dead now, and better men have been left at San Antonio before this."

Don Lorenzo agreed, with his usual charming smile, and donned his clothes with perfect calmness.

As he went out he shook his hand at the body of the Swiss, and muttered through his clenched teeth:

"Now for the other."

The sea-gulls went circling and screaming over the white-capped waves that kissed the shore of the island of San Antonio, and hovered over a place in the center of the islet, hidden from view by the sand-banks.

There lay the senseless body of poor Antonio Bonetta, just breathing, the blood curdled dry on his wounds. A fisherman, hovering near, noted the sea-birds, and snuffed a prize afar off. Dead men were often left, clothes and all, on that island, and jewels were often on their dress. So the fisherman landed, and proceeded to the well-known dueling-ground, where he found the captain, surrounded by sea-gulls, who were already hopping or waddling round, ready to attack his eyes in a moment more.

At the sight of a living man they flapped heavily off, and the fisherman grumblingly picked up the blue and red jerkin and cloak of the unfortunate duelist.

"Only one of those soldiers," he said; "and they never have the wherewithal to buy a mass for their souls. 'Mas, thou hast bad luck all the time.'"

He rummaged in the purse, and found several ducats, which restored his spirits somewhat. Then he approached the body itself, and was startled to behold on the little finger of the left hand a diamond of great size. Delightedly he went on his knees to pull it off, when the supposed corpse opened its eyes, and said, in a low tone:

"Water, for Christ's love!"

The fisherman was a good-hearted fellow, and the corpse was too undeniably alive to be easily disposed of. He ran off to his boat and brought back a flagon of cheap wine, which he poured down the other's throat. The cool evening air had stopped the bleeding, and the wine revived Bonetta quite enough to enable him to rise and stagger faintly to the boat, with the sturdy fisherman's arm around him. The captain was a tough old soldier, and took a good deal of killing.

"Get me to Venice, to the Swiss barracks," he said, weakly, to the fisherman, as the latter laid him down in the stern sheets, "and thou shalt have all my money."

The sturdy fisherman bent to his oars, and they were soon going back across the lagoon, now golden with the last rays of the setting sun. Bonetta had fallen into a stupor, half faint, half sleep, when he was aroused by the sound of a gay chorus. He looked up, and they were close to Venice, and a very large barge, crowded with brilliant ladies and cavaliers, was passing within a few yards. The Swiss raised his eyes, filmy with pain, and beheld the Countess Milleroni conspicuous among a group, who were listening to his foe of the morning, Don Lorenzo Bellario, gay and debonaire, handsomer than ever, as he sung to a lute the gay

BARCAROLE:

"Over the dancing waters our gallant vessel dashes so free along:
Beautiful maidens beside us flash bright eyes over the sea:
Gayly the white sails swelling, the ruffling breezes roamingly flee along;
Carol our merry barcarole, the song of the rovers free."

Bonetta gave a low groan, as he heard the countess's sweet voice rise in the answering strain:

"The white foam glitters merrily, billows are laughing for glee,
And fluttering sea-birds are skimming and dipping all over the sparkling, sparkling sea."

And the whole boat load joined in the rolling chorus, that so cruelly mocked the wounded man:

"All over the sparkling, sparkling sea!
Music and love are roaming free!
Who would not flee
Away like we, we, we, roving free!
Over the dancing, leaping, endless sweeping, never-resting sea,
Over the brightly-flashing, joyfully-dashing, sparkling, ever-changing sea."

The gay chorus floated away from the forlorn, wounded man, and the brilliant company seemed to be quite blind to his presence. They saw the humble fishing-boat, and a man lying in the stern. That was all.

Not so Don Lorenzo.

His keen eye caught sight of the blue and red cloak of the other, and he glowed with triumph, as he came nearer to the countess, and sung with fervid passion the second verse, emphasizing the sweeter passages for his poor rival's benefit:

"The Goddess of Love from the sea came, sprung from the white foam glittering cheerily:
Sing to her, lovers and maidens, as over the sea we rove.

We'll sing to the darlings we love so, skimming the wave-crests, sparkling merrily,
Breezes are fair afloat us, and the sea is the place for love."

Ah! what a groan came from the captain, when the countess again responded:

"Flutter the gallant streamers, sea-birds skim over the wave,
Lovers and music are coming among you, all over the sparkling billows so brave."

And the poor Swiss burst into tears of utter weakness and desolation, as the barge floated away, with the last sweet chorus dying on the distance:

"All over the sparkling, sparkling sea!
Music and love are roaming free."

"And there is a God in heaven," murmured the poor soldier, as he lay back and wished for death, for did not his mistress seem to be faithless!

And the gay pleasure-boat swept out of his view, the mocking chorus still ringing:

"All over the sparkling, sparkling sea."

CHAPTER VI.

OVER THE SPARKLING, SPARKLING SEA.

UNDER the fair outside of that gay pleasure barge, that contained Don Lorenzo Bellario and the brilliant nobles and ladies, lurked the hidden serpent of care. Had poor Antonio Bonetta known all, he would not have thought so badly of his mistress's faith.

The Countess Milleroni belonged to one of the proudest families in Venice, and one which she dreaded to expose to the tongue of scandal. To the outward world she could give no intimation of her enmity to Bellario, without also exciting curiosity and giving rise to envious gossip about her cousin Julia. She had not seen her betrothed, Captain Bonetta, all that day, and could not consult with him on what to do. Therefore when the afternoon came on which she was already engaged to join in a pleasure sail with the noblest of Venice, she had been unable to refuse, for fear of exciting comment, although she knew that probably Don Lorenzo would be of the party.

Estella Milleroni was one of those good creatures who are prone to believe good of others. She had no intimation of the duel. Indeed, Bonetta had deceived her on that point, to allay her fears, telling her that he should be on guard at the arsenal all day. So he was, as regarded his tour of duty, but he had managed to induce a brother-officer to take his place, to enable him to keep his appointment with Lorenzo.

And so, when Don Lorenzo had approached her at the landing-place, and whispered to her under cover of the crowd:

"Countess, I was wrong last night. Will you forgive me? I have seen Bonetta, and satisfied him. Pardon me my mad words," the severe but kind-hearted countess had relented a little, and answered, gravely:

"I am glad you have come to your senses, Don Lorenzo."

This was not very warm encouragement, but Lorenzo was acting a part, and was not easily discouraged. He raised his fine eyes to hers, with that piteous, pleading expression that won so many hearts for their owner, and behaved so like a repentant sinner that Estella found herself insensibly feeling less and less anger toward him. Fear of his fascinations she had none. She knew too well the simple, noble nature of her faithful Swiss captain, not to feel secure of her own faith. Engaged ladies often do this.

When the boat moved out from the landing-place, and Bellario's barcarole was loudly called for by the guests, the countess could not refuse to take the soprano part of the song, when universally requested.

And so it happened that she had ignorantly passed by her wounded lover, and unwittingly stabbed that great, tender heart, that lay hidden within his rough, hardy frame.

Away went the splendid barge, the evening

breeze swelling the silken sail, the gay chorus ringing like a knell in the ears of poor Bonetta, Don Lorenzo alone conscious, and exulting in his revenge.

"My faith! ladies and signors," he exclaimed, gayly, as the boat skimmed on, "such an evening is only fit to be dedicated to music and love. Let each cavalier choose his queen for the night, and thus I kneel to my queen, the first star of evening."

And he bent his knee to Donna Estella, laying the lute at her feet. There was a gay cry of applause.

The proposition was well suited to those soft Southern natures, and to the manners of the times. In a moment the gay party broke into pairs, all uniting in the sweet chorus. Don Lorenzo smiled triumphantly as he looked back, and saw the marble-pale face of Bonetta over the gunwale of the little fishing-boat. He boldly passed his arm half around the countess as he knelt, and saw the face of the Swiss fall back as he did so.

The lady drew back with haughty surprise at the freedom.

"Signor," she said, freezingly, "you are too bold."

Don Lorenzo clasped his hands pathetically as he knelt, and murmured in his low, flute-like tones:

"Forgive me, madonna; I knew not what I did. The hour, the scene, the music, so many lovers around, and I all alone. Oh! Madonna Estella, you are so happy! You cannot even pity the secret woes of him who carries a gay outside, with a breaking heart."

He had gained one point, in tormenting his rival. He commenced, with consummate craft, his advances to the lady, by playing the broken-hearted penitent. And he looked so handsome!

"If you are sincerely sorry," said the countess, sagely, with the air of a nun lecturing a novice—"if you really repent for the evil you have done, Don Lorenzo, you should try to amend."

Don Lorenzo lowered the long lashes over his fine eyes. They were alone in the gayly-chattering crowd, quite unheeded, save by a few envious rival beauties, as the Spanish gallant murmured plaintively:

"Ah! madonna, I do try so hard, but alas! I have no friend to help me to rise, and oh! so many temptations to drag me down."

And again he lifted his soft dark eyes, pleading and full of tears, to hers, with the simplicity of a child asking its mother a boon.

Estella, almost unconsciously, felt a little flutter of pity come over her, as she looked at the handsome penitent.

"Oh! why did you not say that last night?" she whispered, in a tone of sad reproach. "You know, Don Lorenzo, that I had loved to hear of you, for my dead husband's sake, who called you always a gallant officer. Why would you force me to be your enemy, by attacking the honor of my family?"

Don Lorenzo lowered his eyes again, and knelt, the picture of shame and interesting penitence. As the countess had said, he had been a great favorite with her gallant husband, the admiral of Venice, when Bellario, a wild, dashing young noble, first came to Venice, five years before, to study naval war under the masters of the Mediterranean. The young bride of eighteen had blushed as she fastened the collar of Saint Mark around the neck of the handsome young soldier, for brave deeds done against the Turk.

But the widow of Milleroni, in her three years' mourning, had heard sad stories against the gay profligate, and had refused to be civil to him when she returned to society. But a soft place had always lain in her heart for Lorenzo, almost unknown to herself. He knew it well enough, and counted on it.

He whispered out at last:

"I could not help it. I was mad, foolish, lost to everything, for I had lost my only true love, and the fiends drove me to sin for consolation."

The countess looked sage and maternal, as she contemplated Bellario.

"But that was very wrong," she declared.

Don Lorenzo lifted his eyes pleadingly.

"What is life without love?" he murmured. "We are born with our natures, and I cannot help mine. I die without love, or at least sweet friendship."

The countess retired a little.

"You have many friends, Don Lorenzo. Too many, the world says, for a good man to have."

"And yet all would I give for one moment of your—" and he stopped short, as if terribly confused, and looked down at the velvet carpet that covered the deck by their feet.

Estella started, and flushed crimson. Then she drew up her head a little haughtily.

"You forget, signor, whom you address. The promised wife of a brave soldier, left to him by my brave lord on his death-bed."

"Ah, no. I do not," murmured Lorenzo, in low, fervid tones of melancholy passion; "I know too well that my love is mad and hopeless. But even the bright sun may be loved by the humble roadside flower. I know that he is brave, good, and noble, and almost worthy of thee. But I cannot help my heart. I loved thee from the moment those fair hands clasped that collar, which has never left me since. And yet thou wonderest that I fly to anything to escape the constant pangs of hopeless but never dying love."

His voice sunk into a mournful, despairing cadence, as he spoke the last words, and his eyes rested on hers a moment and then turned sadly away.

The countess was silent. Such a melancholy avowal, from such a distinguished gallant, contained a subtle flattery few women could have withstood entirely unmoved. Estella found herself looking at the forlorn cavalier with such pity as might yet be dangerous. And so the light bark sailed over the waters, to the faint light of the waning moon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LION'S MOUTH.

In a lofty room of the Ducal Palace, sat Dandolo, the blind old Doge of Venice, who, in his seventieth year, had gained a great victory over the Turks, by which he is known to this day.

The Doge was a stately and imposing old man, with a venerable white beard, and he wore the flowing robes and ducal bonnet that marked his high office. But since the day of his great glory, Dandolo had been failing so rapidly that he was but a shadow of his former self.

He was sitting in his chair of state, in company with ten grave and dignified magnates, all of princely families, the celebrated Council of Ten. Before them was an official in black, with a bundle of papers in his hand.

The Doge was half asleep in his chair. One of the councilors placed his hand on his arm, and said, gently:

"The papers from the Lion's Mouth are about to be read, my lord. Will your highness listen to them?"

The old Doge was treated with more courtesy and reverence than some of his successors. His military reputation made the people idolize him, and the Council of Ten followed the popular lead during his reign.

At the question and touch, he roused himself from his stupor, and demanded, nervously:

"What? what? The Lion's Mouth? Yes, yes, signors. Let us hear them if they are of State importance. But no private quarrels. We have had enough of them."

The Lion's Mouth was an institution peculiar to the subtle, crafty Venetian republic. At the foot of the grand staircase of the Ducal Palace was a great stone lion, into whose open mouth were nightly slipped anonymous accusations, or information of State importance. These papers were taken out every morning by an officer appointed therefor, and regularly considered by the council.

"Oh, no," said the councilor, gravely; "we examine nothing that is not of importance to public morals or the safety of the State. Nicolo, read the papers."

The old Doge straightened up in his chair, and fixed his sightless eyes on vacancy, while he listened to the dull voice of the official mechanically reading the papers.

The first was a fierce attack on a merchant of the town, for consorting with Jews, and taking exorbitant interest for money lent.

"A rival in business," said the quavering voice of the old man. "Burn it, Nicolo. Such stuff is not worth repeating."

"Perhaps it would be as well to investigate the matter," said a smooth-faced, crafty-looking councilor. "There are heavy fines for usury, and the treasury would benefit thereby."

The blind Doge turned fiercely on him, with some of his ancient fire.

"Signor Foscari," he said, "wait till Dandolo is in his grave before you put on the Doge's bonnet. Burn the paper, Nicolo."

It was curious to notice how the decrepit old man warmed at opposition into the general, impatient of contradiction.

Foscari was the only dissenter from the Doge's will, and the paper was burned in the taper.

"Go on, Nicolo," ordered old Dandolo. "The next, my son."

Nicolo read a second family attack, which shared the fate of the first. The old Doge patted the floor, impatiently, with his trembling foot.

"Don't read any more of that stuff, Nicolo," he cried, in his high, quavering tones; "go to the next."

Nicolo opened the third letter, a large packet, sealed with red wax.

He began, in a clear voice:

"To the most high Doge, the Lord Andrea Dandolo, exterminator of the Turks and other Infidels:

"GREAT DOGE:

"A traitor lives in your midst, who has sworn to betray the Republic to the Turks."

"Ha!" cried the old warrior, half-starting up, all tremulous as he was, from his chair, "The Turk! Traitors! What means this, signors? Have we no police, that the first news of a traitor comes to us from the Lion's Mouth? Read on, Nicolo. What says the letter further?"

The secretary continued:

"The traitor's name is Antonio Bonetta, captain of the Swiss halberdiers of the guard, and commander of the red division of the galley's of the republic."

There was a whisper of surprise from the council, for the name of Bonetta was well known as the betrothed husband of the Countess Milleroni, the Doge's niece. Old Dandolo sunk back in his chair, and trembled. He had hardly strength to utter, in a low tone:

"Go on."

The secretary read on:

"The proofs of his treason, his correspondence with Daoud Pasha, the Grand Vizier of the Turk, will be found in his quarters if he be promptly arrested, but if he be warned he will be able to destroy them. They are hidden in the bolster of his bed. This letter comes from one who asks no higher title than

"A FRIEND TO THE STATE."

When this letter was finished there was a short silence. At last the smooth, oily tones of Martino Foscari were audible as he said:

"And what action will it please the worshipful council to take upon this important revelation?"

There was no answer. Every one was looking at the old Doge, who seemed to have shrunk into himself, as it were, so haggard and broken did he look.

"Antoine—" he muttered; "a traitor to us—he—when I have promoted him and given him my brother's child—it must be a lie."

Again did the quiet voice of Foscari make itself heard.

"Signors, I must again request the attention of the council. What is to be done about this?"

Old Dandolo turned his head peevishly, and asked:

"Are you as bad as Job's friends, Foscari? Can you not give me time to swallow down my spittle? No man can say that Dandolo has served the State amiss."

Foscari was silent, awed by the indignant glances of the Doge's friends; and the old man gradually recovered his calmness. Presently he turned round his head, and said:

"Call the officer of the day."

His tone was that of a commander on ordinary business.

Nicolo left the room, and speedily ushered in a man in complete armor, whose plumes and white scarf announced him for an officer of men-at-arms.

"Who is that?" asked the Doge, sharply, as he caught the clang of the other's armed tread.

"Captain Fonelli, officer of the day, at your highness's orders," said the soldier, stiffly saluting.

"Aha!" said the old man, quickly; "I know thee, Fonelli—a good soldier, and a brave sailor. How many men hast thou disposable to make an arrest, captain?"

"Forty, besides men on guard," said the captain, briefly.

"Take ten men," said the Doge, sternly, "go to the quarters of Captain Bonetta, of the Swiss guards. Bring him here, dead or alive, if he is in Venice. Stop. If he be not at his quarters, send after him and return hither at once, with the bolster of his bed. You are instructed. Go. Return in ten minutes."

The officer saluted with a clash of arms and wheeled short round. In another moment he was clattering down the passage. The old Doge turned round with trembling lip to the council and said:

"You see, my lords, that Donald do does not need advice from Foscari, when the State is in question."

There was a murmur of pity and sympathy from all his friends, as the blind Doge's voice trembled. One of the councilors observed:

"After all, your highness, this is but a nameless accuser. It needs proof to substantiate such charges against a man who has done the State such service."

The old man shook his head sadly.

"You are kind, Faliero," he said. "Heaven grant the accusation be false. We can only wait for Fonelli's return."

A painful and oppressive silence fell upon all the room which no one dared to break. The old Doge sunk back in his chair, and seemed to collapse, while the old nobles of the council looked ominously at one another, and shook their heads. The great bell of St. Mark's slowly tolled out the hour of noon as they sat thus, and the dull clang of the last note had just died away on the still air, when a heavy tramp of armed feet approached the door, and the white plumes of Captain Fonelli appeared.

The old Doge started up and eagerly asked:

"Well, Fonelli? Well? What news?"

CHAPTER VIII.

TREASON.

"CAPTAIN BONETTA left Venice last night, on the caravel that sails for Leghorn with dispatches," was the announcement that came like a thunder-clap to the astounded council.

Signor Foscari jumped up excitedly, screaming out:

"I knew it! We ought to clear the Lion's Mouth every night as well as morning. He's got wind of it, the Swiss traitor!"

Captain Fonelli stalked up the room to the Doge's chair, bearing in his hands a common straw bolster, such as they use for soldiers' beds. He cast a glance of contempt at Foscari as he did so, for the Swiss mercenaries were very independent, and Fonelli was a Swiss, too. He knew his own value, and cared not a button for the Council of Ten.

"There are no traitors in Switzerland," he said, bluffly. "My lord Doge, your highness asked for Captain Bonetta's bolster. Her it is."

The blind Doge eagerly clutched at the hard bolster, and felt all over it. His face cleared up, as he cried out:

"There is nothing in the bolster but straw. I can feel."

"Then why did Bonetta leave Venice without orders?" asked Foscari, suspiciously. "My lord Doge, in the name of justice, I insist that that bolster be cut open."

The old Doge bowed sarcastically.

"I need no instructions on my duty, signor. The office of Doge is one that you may find a thankless one, some day. At present, leave me to exercise it. Fonelli, your dagger."

The old man ripped open the case of the bolster and proceeded to pull out the straw with trembling hands, never recking of the velvet robes he defiled. All eyes were on him, as handful after handful was scattered on the floor, and still nothing but the innocent straw made its appearance.

At last the old Doge shook out the last remnants on the floor with a triumphant:

"Well, Signor Foscari, where are the proofs now?"

"There!" said the councilor, calmly, and he pointed to what the blind old man could not note of necessity.

As he shook out the empty case a crumpled piece of paper fell on the floor, and Foscari, bending forward, picked it up.

"Now, my lords," he said, "you see that the letter from the Lion's Mouth had some foundation. Let us read this carefully-hidden document."

"What is it?" asked the old man, querulously: "what does he say?"

Faliero told him of the fluttering paper, and the Doge turned pale and trembled.

"I feared it," he groaned. "Alas! poor Estella!"

Foscari spread open the paper with malicious slowness, and read aloud:

"WORTHY CAPTAIN:

"Your demand is judged moderate. You shall have the money when you have delivered up the fleet. His Resplendency, the Padisha, assures you of his consideration and of the title of Aga, with a Beylik of Janissaries. DAUD PASHA."

"It is Daoud Pasha's own hand," said Foscari, excitedly. "He is an Italian renegade, and is employed to bribe the Christians to desert. Signors, what more do we want? The man must be a traitor, and has fled to avoid a traitor's punishment. Let us strike his name from

the rolls of the guard, and set a price on his head."

The old Doge raised his head once more.

"Signors," he said, faintly, "I pray you to let me retire awhile. This is the first traitor I have ever had in my family. No, not there, but very near it. I am overcome by the news. Pass your sentence, if it please you, and I will sign it. At present I am ill."

There was a burst of sympathy from all present, and two of the most distinguished nobles hastened to offer their help to escort the tottering form of the old Doge to the door.

Foscari alone showed none. He belonged to a rival family, which in turn furnished Venice with rulers, and he had a great itching to stand in the other's shoes.

As soon as the Doge had retired, he pressed upon the council the announcement of Bonetta's dismissal from the service, and used such good arguments that the decree was passed at once, with a further one offering a price of five thousand crowns for the capture of the Swiss, dead or alive.

This was all that could be done. There were no telegraphs in those days. Even the arquebuss was almost an unknown weapon. Wherever Bonetta fled in Italy, he was safe, so long as he touched not Venetian territory. The republics of Florence, Genoa, and Pisa, were as intensely jealous of each other, as all were hostile to the Turks.

And Andrea Dandolo, more broken by that day's work than by all his eighty years of battle and state-craft, sent for his daughter Julia and his niece Estella, to break to them the news of the foul treason of one whom all had loved alike.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOGE'S DAUGHTER.

JULIA DANDOLO, the young daughter of the aged Doge, was not in the ducal palace. She lived in the private palace of the Dandolo family, where she was now, in deep conversation with her cousin, the Countess Milleroni.

Julia was the child of her father's old age, his one darling, whom he felt too jealous of, even to allow her to marry. As a devotee had she been brought up, in charge of the pious brothers and sisters of the church, who flattered themselves that in her young mind the world was effectually buried. Surrounded by such influences, seeing nothing of the gay society of the city, Julia might have been expected to be subdued to a nonentity.

Quite the contrary. She was only bored.

She inherited too much of her father's fiery energy to be made a recluse of, and too much of her Florentine mother's subtle diplomacy to rebel openly. The end of this restraint, under which she was kept, was singular. From ten to sixteen she employed her mind on mastering every science and language that the holy fathers could teach her. At seventeen she could tell any one of them all he knew. At eighteen she also knew her own powers, and was planning incessantly to escape abroad and exercise them. At eighteen and a half, when we meet her, she was an accomplished mistress of deceit, with the innocent grace of a kitten to hide its claws. Julia Dandolo was small and slight, very pretty, with long, bright curls and blue eyes. She was leaning on Estella's knee, looking up into her eyes coaxingly as she said:

"But indeed, Estella, it was but a harmless affair. I saw the cavalier only a week ago, and it is so dull here, you know. How could I help speaking to him? You know I never went out and enjoyed myself as you do."

"And I never went out till I was married," expostulated the countess, severely. "It is not fitting, Julia, for a young girl to talk to strange men. Men are like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour."

Julia glanced up at her sage cousin from under her bright curls, with a strange, keen look in her blue eyes.

"But you talk to men," cousin, she said, softly; "Guiseppina told me, only this morning, that you were the belle of the Foscari ball, the night before last."

The countess flushed angrily, as she replied:

"Guiseppina is a gossiping servant girl, and I should think that you would not refer to that night, when only my interference, along with Captain Bonetta, saved you from being the public talk. If I had told your father, as I threatened, you would have been sent off to the convent of Madonna del Mare before this."

Julia pouted slightly.

"Captain Bonetta's very kind," she said, peevishly. "I wish he and you would leave me

alone. I don't think it's fair that the only man I ever saw, should be betrothed to some one else. I don't count priests."

Estella lifted her hands in pious horror. Her proper and well-regulated notions were inexpressibly shocked by the surprising heresies of this little rebel.

"Julia," she said, severely, "I must keep my word and tell him."

"You may save yourself the trouble," murmured Julia, in a lamb-like voice; "I told him yesterday, when you were on the lake, madonna, along with Don Lorenzo."

And the little kitten shot up a glance that plainly said:

"How do you like that?"

The countess sat for a moment in speechless amazement. How did this child, shut up among recluses, know all this? Julia kindly informed her before she asked.

"Oh! you needn't think I don't know anything," she added, tossing her bright curls. "Papa mia is not so terrible as you think him. He lets Guiseppina go out and get me the news of the city, now and then. And I told him all about how Don Lorenzo had come to our palace to give me some secret news about a Turkish conspiracy, and how you and that stupid Captain Bonetta interfered and hurt the poor old man."

"Old man!" exclaimed Estella, amazed. "Who do you mean?"

"Poor old Don Lorenzo," said Julia, plaintively; "I never saw him except in the dark, but he says that he is very old."

The countess looked at Julia with a wistful glance. The blue-eyed kitten returned the gaze with the guileless innocence of a new-born angel. Estella was five years older than her cousin, a brilliant woman of society, and till that day had been accustomed to overawe the other. She began to think that Julia knew too much. She tried to put her down by an assumption of authority.

"You wicked girl," she exclaimed, "you have deceived your poor blind father. Who would have thought it would come to this? I will send for Father Francis, your confessor. We will see if bread and water penance will not bring you to your senses."

"You needn't trouble yourself," protested Julia, pouting; "I told papa how cross Father Francis was, and he has promised to have a fresh confessor for me."

The countess was about to answer when a great clattering was heard on the stone floor of the corridor outside.

"There he is now," said Julia, triumphantly. "That's my new confessor, Father Ambrose. Now tell him what you like."

The door opened, and a monk in the brown habit of the Carmelites entered the room, his wooden sandals making a great clatter. The monk was rather tall, but stooped with age, and wore a very long, bushy gray beard. He had a weary air and kept his eyes fixed on the ground. One of them was covered with a black shade, and the other looked reddened around the lids, as if inflamed.

"Pax vobiscum, my daughters!" he said, in a low voice, (of remarkable sweetness, however); "I was told that I should find my young charge, the lady Julia, here. I am poor Father Ambrose, of Mount Carmel, and my superior has sent me to care for that tender lamb, and lead her in the right path."

"You will find it a hard task, father," declared the countess, in a severe tone. "The child, is very, very troublesome. What do you say, father, to her conversing from her chamber window with a young cavalier, without her father's knowledge?"

The good monk lifted up his hands in amazement, although he kept his eyes fixed on the ground, under the rule of his order. He groaned deeply and said:

"The devouring wolf is ever ready to rend the tender lamb. The poor, silly lamb knows not of the peril. We must be gentle with her, madonna, and teach her the right way. She seems sorry."

In fact, Julia looked the picture of penitence, as she hung her pretty head and glanced shyly at the grave confessor from under her curls.

"Let us commence our office, my daughter," he half ordered. "The church is a good mother to her repentant child, and honest confession is good for the soul. Madonna, let us pray you leave us, for the church would be alone with her daughter."

The countess rose with a satisfied air.

"Certainly, father, and I hope you will be severe with her, for she deserves it richly. Your blessing, father."

She sunk on her knees, and the monk waved his hand over her in benediction.

"*Benedicite, filia mea!*" he said; "*Pax Domini tecum, in secula. Amen.*"

The countess glided from the room in silence, and Father Ambrose resumed his seat in a large chair. The humility of demeanor he had worn ceased, as the steps of the countess receded on the stone flagging. The authority of the confessor replaced it.

Julia came near, with charming timidity, and knelt at his feet, when the Carmelite observed:

"Begin, my daughter, with the cavalier, yonder lady mentioned. Who was he? How came he under your window?"

Julia bent her head with a crimson blush. It is so different to tell these things to a man. She began to cry.

"He was a handsome cavalier, father, so handsome. I saw him first from my window one evening, as he passed by in his gondola, and he kissed his hand to me. And then, every evening, at the same hour he passed in front of the house and turned down the side canal. And one moonlight night as I sat by the window, when every one was asleep, he came again, and sung, oh! so sweetly. And before he went he shot an arrow up into my window, and oh! father, there was a letter wrapped round it. Wasn't he bold?"

The Carmelite turned away his head a moment, and said in a gruff tone:

"Go on, child. Heaven defend the lamb from the wolf."

"But he wasn't a bit like the wolf, father," she protested. "He was about your height, with lovely black hair and eyes. And what do you think he said in his letter?"

"Ask me not, child," answered Father Ambrose, grimly; "those wicked men are all alike. He asked you to meet him somewhere, no doubt, or to change your room to some more quiet part of the house. The wiles of the devil are thousand."

"Why, father," with a little low laugh, "you must be a wizard! How could you know that? He told me he knew that I could do anything with my father—and so I can, you know—and that I ought to ask him to change my room to one in the side of the house, just over the little postern where it was quieter. And I did, father. I was very wicked, but it was so dull and quiet, and I longed so to see him. And so, father, we met, and he was so respectful and tender, and we changed rings, and—ah!"

Julia broke off with a low shriek of surprise, and terror. One of the monk's hands, hitherto hidden in his long sleeve, stole out, white and tapering, on his knee, and on the little finger gleamed a ring, composed of five jewels, amethyst, malachite, onyx, ruby and emerald. The initial letters of the five composed the Italian word *amore*—love, and the girl recognized the ring.

"Hush!" said the false monk, in an eager whisper; "Julia, my love, my queen of hearts, I have risked death to see thee. It is I, Lorenzo!"

He prevented her screaming by catching her to his breast, and covering her head with his wide sleeves. But after the first moment of surprise the clever girl seemed to have no intention of screaming. She nestled up to her disguised lover, and said, plaintively:

"Why didn't you show me that before? I could have teased Estella so."

Don Lorenzo laughed.

"I didn't dare to," he exclaimed. "You would have started and betrayed all. You are no actress yet, my poor, innocent little dove. Safe in your dove-cot from the snares of the fowler you have no occasion for deceit yet."

Julia looked up at him with a peculiar glance, and withdrew herself from his arms.

"You think so? Well, you are right. I had no occasion for deceit till I saw Don Lorenzo."

Bellarion opened his arms coaxingly.

"Don't let us quarrel, Julia mia," he pleaded; "our enemies are outwitted, and we can be happy. Did I not do it well?" As he approached her, the girl retreated, pointing her finger at him.

"Oh! how ugly you look!" she exclaimed. "Don't come near me while you look like that. I shall never be able to think of you again as my handsome Lorenzo."

Bellarion halted, a little confused, and began to take the black shade off his eye. His vanity was wounded.

"Oh! here they come! Here they come!" cried Julia, with every symptom of terror. "Put it on again, or you will be found out."

And indeed the sound of approaching footsteps was plainly audible. Lorenzo replaced the

patch and resumed his seat, while Julia threw herself at his feet and began a rattling fire of teasing remarks till the door opened.

The little girl seemed to be determined to prove to her lover that, deep as he was, she was no novice.

"Ah! how ugly you look!" she whispered, making a little grimace of disgust, and giving him a sly pinch; "you have painted one eye, and covered the other, till you look like a starved beggar. I shall never like you again (pinch). I've got you now, signor. You think I knew nothing of your love-making yesterday. Over the sparkling, sparkling sea! (pinch). Call out if you dare, and the sbirri will have you in one minute, for coming here in disguise (pinch). I'll teach you to go about making love to all the beauties of Venice, and especially to my saintly cousin (pinch) Estella" (vicious pinch).

The door opened at the last words, after several unanswered knocks, and the Countess Milleroni, followed by a liveried messenger, entered, and found the innocent Julia on her knees, with clasped hands and bended head, her face the impersonation of sweet humility and heartstricken penitence.

"Oh! father," she murmured, so wrapped in sorrow as to be insensible to surrounding objects; "how shall I ever obtain forgiveness for my terrible, terrible sins? You have brought to my mind so fully what a wretch I was to have any thing to do with that infamous Spaniard, that common stabber and bravo, Don Lorenzo Bellario. Indeed, father, I accuse myself of every thing wicked in regard to him, and for being so rude to my good cousin Estella. And indeed, father, I hate and despise that infamous wretch Bellario, and I will ask my father to have him beheaded for a traitor."

"Peace, my daughter!" said the false monk with admirable gravity, and quite as unconscious to all appearance of the presence of strangers; "Bellario was a bad man, but he is now truly repentant, and there is much joy in heaven over such. But now, my daughter, it behooves thee to forgive him, as he is sincerely penitent, and so thou mayest prepare thyself to receive absolution after penance performed. In the first place thou must crave pardon on thy knees of the worthy countess, and of Captain Bonetta, for thine evil talk against them, and then—"

The countess motioned to the servant, and the two softly retired, closing the door behind them. As soon as it was closed Julia inflicted a violent pinch in revenge on Don Lorenzo, and then they heard several loud knocks on the door and coughing.

"I'll beg her pardon," muttered Julia, revengefully; "but I'll make you pay for it first, signor monk."

"Come in!" cried Don Lorenzo, desperately, the fear of the consequences of detection alone restraining him from crying out, so viciously did the artful little minx torment him.

The door opened again, and the religious tableau was once more presented to view. Don Lorenzo turned his head and the countess saluted him respectfully.

"Reverend father," she said, "I am sorry to disturb your duties, but his highness, the Doge, has just sent an urgent message requesting the immediate attendance of his own daughter and myself on important business."

The venerable monk bowed his head meekly. "It is well, my daughter," he considered; "the lady Julia can go. I have confessed her and enjoined a penance upon her, which she will now perform. Come forward, madonna."

The countess swept forward, and the monk led her to the kneeling penitent, who repeated with angelic patience, after her confessor:

"Dear cousin, I spoke very ill to you, and I crave your pardon and that of Heaven therefor. Please forgive me."

The countess raised her and embraced her warmly. Julia laid her head on her cousin's shoulder with a sob, and made a grimace at the reverend father, unseen by any one else.

Then the two cousins left the room, preceded by the servant, and humble Father Ambrose hobbled after, making a great clatter with his wooden sandals.

CHAPTER X.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

At the water-stairs of the Dandolo palace lay a state barge, into which the ladies stepped, closely veiled. Humble Father Ambrose was about to retire, when the countess graciously beckoned him forward.

"We shall be too much honored by your company, father," she said. "There are no secrets too great not to be shared with the church."

The Carmelite bowed with great humility,

and sat down in the boat next to the countess, keeping clear of the dangerous vicinity of Julia Dandolo.

He displayed the same edifying humility all the way to the palace, and even removed his sandals to avoid disturbing the magnates as they passed up the grand staircase by the lion's mouth. The servant preceded the ladies down the long passages till he ushered them into the Doge's private cabinet, where they found the old warrior all alone seated by the window, and looking haggard and weary.

"Is it thou, Mateo?" asked the Doge quickly, as he turned round at the opening of the door.

"It is, your highness," replied the servant. "I have brought the ladies and their ghostly father to see your highness."

"Welcome, my children," said the blind old man, sadly. "The holy father is welcome, too. Mateo, retire. Julia, my child, come close to me. I cannot see thee, child but I know thou art there. Estella, come hither, and you, holy father. I have a sad tale to tell thee, my brother's child. Would to God it were not so, but Estella, it is better coming from me than from another."

Julia was already at her father's knee, silently kissing his hand. The countess caught her breath and turned pale, as she asked:

"My lord, what mean you? Is he hurt? Has he fought Don Lorenzo?"

The Doge shook his head sadly. Julia glanced keenly up at Estella, with a look of surprise.

"I know nothing of Don Lorenzo," declared the Doge. "He was a good and gallant officer five years ago, but they tell me he has been wild and dissipated since. Ah! well. I was a wild youth once. He may do well yet. No, Estella. It is not of Don Lorenzo that I would speak, but of Antonio Bonetta, the captain whom I trusted, whom I made commander of the red galleys, my own guard in battle, the man whom I made noble, and promised to take the place of Milleroni, dead in the arms of victory. Antonio Bonetta is a traitor to the land of his adoption, and he has fled Venice to go to the Turk."

Estella had been growing paler and paler as he proceeded. At the last words she uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"Gone! Antonio! It cannot be! My lord, I saw him only the night before last."

"Estella," said the Doge, firmly, "he is gone. And hidden in his room was found a letter proving him to be in league with the Turk."

"But how know you this, my lord?" she gasped out. "May not there be a mistake?"

The old Doge waved his hand for silence.

"Peace!" he cried. "In the lion's mouth was found his accusation, which also designated the hiding-place of Daoud Pasha's letter. We sent there and found it, and learned, moreover, that Bonetta left Venice last night, in the caravel with dispatches sailing for Leghorn. He must have got wind of suspicion from some quarter."

The countess looked wildly around her and met the sad, pitying glance of Father Ambrose. She shuddered, and burst into bitter tears.

"Oh! my lord, my lord," she sobbed; "what have I done that this disgrace should fall upon me?"

The Doge bowed his white head sadly.

"On all of us, Estella," he answered, "unless we cast away all memory of this ungrateful traitor."

The countess stamped her foot haughtily.

"Let it perish forever!" she exclaimed, all the pride of five centuries of nobles blazing in her large hazel eyes. "Never shall it be said that a daughter of Dandolo wept for a traitor whose tears due only to the memory of the brave. My lord, do as you will with him. Henceforth the name of that man never crosses my lips. Fled to the Turk! Let him flee! Estella Milleroni only sorrows that her own hand cannot send the traitor to the block to save her country."

Julia had been perfectly still all this while at her father's knee. Now she asked:

"And what will be done to Bonetta, if he comes back, papa mia?"

"DEATH!" thundered the old Doge, raising his shaking hand. "Venice was his foster-mother. She warmed and fed him. Estella, thou art my other daughter. Thou shouldst be a man, for the spirit of Dandolo is strong in thee."

Father Ambrose turned his back and looked out of the window.

"And she pretended to love this man!" said he to himself, with a bitter sneer. "Madonna! Madonna! My vengeance is going onward."

Julia Dandolo looked at her cousin wistfully.

"Estella," she said, slyly, "you will be consoled."

The countess flushed scarlet and turned away,

CHAPTER XI.

THE BROTHERS BOTTARMA.

THE setting sun glowed crimson, the gleaming belt of the Arno, as it bathed the walls of Florence the fair. The tall cypresses waved in the evening breeze, and the tall white shaft of the Campanile of Giotto, just newly built, shot up beside the magnificent dome of Santa Maria del Fiore.

A tall gaunt man, whose pale and hollow cheeks bespoke recent illness, while the breadth of his shoulders, showing tremendous bone, was contradicted by their skeleton outline, as far as regarded present strength, rode in at the western gate mounted on a mule. He was dressed in a jaded jerkin, and hose of blue and red, that looked as if they had been part of a uniform once, and his right arm was in a sling. Every now and then, as he went, he coughed feebly, and appeared to be in the last stage of exhaustion.

Compassionate glances reached him from various quarters as he rode in, and pulling up his sorry mule, inquired feebly the way to "the brothers Bottarma."

"But every one knows them," answered the worthy citizen addressed; "they live in the Strada Nova, about two streets from this. You will know the house by the crossed swords over the door, with the mortar and pestle above them. A wonderful pair, neighbor. The one brother can wound any man despite all his best efforts. That is Nicola, the master of fence. The other can cure any wound not mortal, so that one makes trade for the other. Nicola and Guiseppe, leech and fencing-master. A great pair, and an honor to Florence. Nowhere else could you find such." And the worthy citizen puffed with importance. "Methinks you look as if you needed the leech, friend," he resumed, inquisitively. "Where from, if I may ask?"

"Purgatory!" said the stranger, grimly, as he shook the rein on the weary mule's neck; "and going to the other place as fast as I can." The Florentine gossip stood gazing after the grim stranger, the picture of amazed horror.

"Well!" he ejaculated, as soon as he found his breath; "it must be the devil himself! From purgatory and going to hell! I never heard such a thing in all my life! I'll go and tell neighbor Scutelli."

And he bustled off, open-mouthed.

Meanwhile the grim stranger rode off up the street to the house of the celebrated brothers Bottarma.

He soon saw it, a handsome edifice, of that beautiful ornamental brick-work of which the Italians of the fifteenth century were such masters, in the severe Italian gothic style. Over the deep doorway were the immense crossed swords, and above them a great gilt pestle and mortar, with the name BOTTARMA FRATELLI in large gold letters beneath.

The tired man slowly and stiffly swung himself from his jaded mule, which he fastened to a stone hitching-post outside. Then he dragged himself rather than walked to the door, and beat on it with the pommel of the rapier he wore.

Having struck three blows, he was fain to sink down on the stone seat by the side of the deep porch, and cough hard, spitting blood as he did so.

Presently the door opened; and a stout, medium-sized man, with a square, good-humored face, short black beard, eye of remarkable keenness, and a general appearance of vigorous health and strength, stood looking at the shabby stranger, who was bent double on the seat, coughing with a deep cavernous sound. The black-bearded man was in his shirt-sleeves, and the bare arms he showed were masses of corded muscle. He glanced keenly at his visitor, then at the mule, and turned his head inside the house.

"Ho! brother!" he shouted, in a stentorian voice; "come down. Thou'rt wanted!"

The shabby stranger raised his head.

"I want both of you," he said, in a low, hoarse voice; "him first and you afterward, if you are Nicola Bottarma."

"I am Nicola Bottarma," said the black-bearded man, kindly; "but my brother will have to take care of you for long before I can have anything to do with you. Here he is now. Brother, here is a sick man. Shall I carry him in?"

A much taller man, slender and intellectual looking, but very like Nicola, although his face was clean-shaven, came out and eyed the stranger keenly for a few moments. Then he felt his pulse, and looked at the jaded mule.

"How far have you come to-day?" he asked, abruptly.

"From Leghorn," said the stranger, faintly.

"Where are you hurt?" asked the leech.

"Here, and here," responded the other, pointing with his left hand to his right breast and shoulder.

"Carry him in, 'Cola," said Guiseppe Bottarma, briefly.

The fencing-master picked up this man of six foot three in his arms, as if he had been an infant, and carried him into the house. Guiseppe went out, untied the mule, gave him a kick and said:

"Go home where you belong. I know you well enough."

The animal trotted off down the street to a sort of livery stable that was there. Bottarma recognized him as belonging there, and knew he was safe.

Then this eccentric specimen of medieval doctor re-entered the house, slammed the door and entered a large room, where he found Nicola, or 'Cola, as he was called for short, standing over the shabby stranger, who lay on a couch. Guiseppe advanced, and before he uttered a word, he undressed the other's wounds and examined them. They proved to be a puncture in the right shoulder, some three inches deep, and three-cornered in shape, and a second wound in the right breast near the shoulder, going clear through to the back. Both wounds were very foul and feverish.

"You must go to bed," said Guiseppe. "Your wounds are healthy enough, but you've fevered them to-day. You must have the strength of a bull to have come from Leghorn with these drains on you."

"Stop!" said the stranger; "how long will it be before I am strong again?"

"Your wounds will heal in two months," said the leech. "After that, 'Cola must take you in hand. He does the training."

The stranger suddenly rose up to his full height before them. He was of vast frame, and must have been very strong when in health. His sunken blue eyes burned with a fierce, feverish glitter, and his matted hair and beard were both of a dull, dusty gray.

"See here," he said; "you see this ring. It is all I have in the world now. It is a diamond, as you see, and it is worth at least ten thousand crowns. I will give you that if you will cure me, and teach me how to handle the sword so as to beat you, 'Cola Bottarma."

'Cola took the ring and examined it admiringly.

"You are too modest, signor," he said; "this ring is worth at least thirty thousand scudi. We cannot rob you like that. We will sell it for you if you wish, and keep ten thousand scudi, but we do not ask for so much. My brother can cure you, and I can teach you to fence. But it only rests with yourself to beat me. I cannot supply you with brains and activity. The best pupil I ever had was Don Lorenzo Bellario. He could beat all the others, but I could not teach him to beat me. He had not patience to study."

The stranger caught at the sound of the last name with eagerness.

"Tell me one thing," he said, with great eagerness; "if I am patient and untiring, never resting from thought day or night, practicing constantly with you, obeying all your instructions, can you promise me that I shall beat him—Bellario?"

He ground out the last word through his teeth in such a fury as set him to coughing again. Guiseppe Bottarma made him sit down, and 'Cola answered the question of his eyes.

"Certainly I can," he said, confidently; "you have reach and strength, when you are well. What you want is quickness. I can give you that in three or four months. Bellario will never make what I call a perfect fencer. He plays his point too wildly. To cure him, you must learn the stop-thrust. That done, you can laugh at him."

"And will you do this?" asked the stranger, eagerly.

"I will," said 'Cola; "what is your name?"

"Sell the diamond," was the stranger's answer, as he sunk back, exhausted; "my name is Schiavo d'Amore."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FALSE PAGE.

THE last flush of evening was dying on the western skies around Venice, when Father Ambrose glided into the stately palace of Don Lorenzo Bellario, and threw back his cowl, with a

* The Slave of Love. Italian.

gay laugh to his discreet porter. The latter was evidently accustomed to his patron's masquerading, for he displayed no surprise when the don pulled off the false beard, scalp and eyepatch, and stripped himself of the brown frock, discovering his ordinary clothes beneath it.

"Now give me my shoes, Giovanni," said the master, as he kicked off the clumsy sandals; and Don Lorenzo shook his black curls, and ascended the broad staircase to his rooms. His different servants came flocking to his footsteps, silent and obsequious, as they had been trained to be under his peculiar rule.

Don Lorenzo passed through the midst of them, with a sharp glance right and left.

"Where's Annetta?" he asked quickly, as he noticed the absence of the dumb girl-page.

"She went out, not three hours after your worship," said the gray-bearded major-domo. "We thought that it was by your orders, and we did not dare to stop the signorina."

Don Lorenzo halted and frowned.

"Where is she now?" he asked. "Why did ye not put a watch on her? Curses on your stupid heads!"

"My lord!" said the steward, aghast, "we had no orders—"

"My lord!" cried another servant, "here is the signorina, now."

Don Lorenzo's face cleared. He turned round, and the slender, fairy-like form of the girl-page was coming bounding up the stairs, as silently and swiftly as a shadow. The servants made way for her, bowing respectfully, and the girl ran to Don Lorenzo, and kissed his hand with a mute gesture of deprecation.

Don Lorenzo looked a little ill-tempered.

"You have been absent too long, Annetta," he said, sternly.

The page tossed her bright curls with a sudden saucy air, dropped the hand of Don Lorenzo, turned her back, and walked into the private rooms, where the don was proceeding, with a defiant swing.

All the servants fell back in pure astonishment. Such a thing from the usually quiet and gentle Annetta was unheard of. Don Lorenzo's black brows bent over his eyes, which seemed to scintillate fire, and he strode after her, slamming the door behind him.

As soon as he was gone, the servants exchanged grins.

"The signorina has taken a turn," said the old steward; "something has got into her since she has been out to-day. If she could only speak, you would hear a noise in there. She might scold rarely."

"It is time she did," added another. "The poor girl has been treated as a slave long enough, dressed up as a boy."

"Best not talk too much, Pedrillo," suggested the steward; "the master may cut the ears off thee, if he hears thee. He pays us well enough, and that's all we want. Let us hear, and see, and say nothing."

The servants dispersed to their posts. They did not try to peep through the key-hole. They knew by experience that it was dangerous to do so.

Meanwhile the little page tripped saucily on, through a suite of four rooms, one behind the other, till she arrived at a small but luxuriously-furnished cabinet, whence a deep oriel window of stained glass looked down upon the Grand Canal.

Here she threw herself down upon a soft, luxurious couch, and quietly awaited the coming of Bellario.

He came soon enough, striding through room after room, and closing the doors violently. Each of them locked itself with a spring-catch as the don advanced, until he found himself in the cabinet, alone with the false page.

She lay back on the couch, her slight figure set off by the close-fitting doublet of violet velvet, slashed with cloth-of-gold, her delicate limbs and feet revealed by the tight silk hose of the same color, while her little hand abstractedly played with the tiny gilt dagger that hung like a plaything from her girdle.

Don Lorenzo stopped as he closed the last door, and regarded the saucy page with a savage frown. His face looked perfectly devilish, handsome though it remained, as he displayed his white teeth, and hissed between them:

"So, my lady! you have been abroad, have you? And you have resolved to defy me, too—have you? Now let us see how long this will last. Do you know what I did to my last page, when she turned insolent like you? She thought that she had a protector in the Alcalde of Seville. Well, my lady, I put her in a sack, and I threw her in the river. I learned the trick of my old friends, the Turks. Do you

want to follow her? Speak, then. I give you leave."

The page had kept her head bent during this speech, so that her face was hidden by the flowing curls. All of a sudden she threw up her head, looked Don Lorenzo full in the face, and said:

"You dare not touch me."

What was it made Don Lorenzo start back at the tones of that voice, and peer so earnestly into the face of the girl-page?

"Annetta!" he exclaimed; "what is the matter? Is it? Who is it? You are not she—Who are you?"

The page leaped up from the couch with a laugh, sprung actively over it, so as to interpose it between her and Don Lorenzo, and drew the tiny dagger from its sheath.

"Before you say a word more," said she, rapidly, "let me warn you. Come not near me. This dagger is poisoned, with such a venom, that a scratch would lay you dead on this floor, in less than a minute."

Don Lorenzo, for the first time in his life perhaps, quailed.

"It is Julia," he faltered. "How came you here?"

"On my feet, my lord," replied Julia Dandolo, herself, with her malicious laugh; "Annetta and I, as you see, are much alike as to face: and our sizes are identical. She is now playing the part of princess in the Dandolo palace, while I—How do I play the Dumb Page, Lorenzo?" she concluded, with an arch laugh, replacing the dagger in its sheath as she spoke.

"Admirably," he answered, but with an air of doubt and anxiety. "But tell me, Julia, how did you find out Annetta?"

"I could not tell you, my lord," she said, again laughing, maliciously; "the secret lies between Annetta and me. But remember only that she was left under my window when your worship was carried off by the saintly countess, and you may understand something."

Don Lorenzo looked at this little girl who revealed such capacity to plot in perfect amazement. But he could not give way to her without an effort to resume his old position with her.

"Sweetest Julia," he said, advancing toward her, and kneeling on one knee; "whatever be that history, is it not enough that thou art here, and that I love thee? Dearest, loveliest of Julias, how I thank thee for this proof of love!"

She allowed him to take her left hand and cover it with kisses, while his soft voice cooed and murmured words of love in her ear. She even smiled in answer. But her right hand again drew the poisoned dagger from its scabbard, and waved it about, closer to his face, with dangerous playfulness, as she said:

"And dost thou really love me, Lorenzo? Really and truly, so that thou wouldst let me kill thee, and bless me in dying?"

He shivered ever so slightly, but answered:

"Love thee, sweet Julia? Heaven has no gift to make me love it, if Julia is the one absent."

"And thou lovest me alone?" she pursued, searching his black eyes with her own blue ones with an intense gaze; "there is no other in Venice, besides me, that thou lovest?"

"None, no, not one," he answered back, in a deep tone, while his arm stole softly round her waist, and his magnetic gaze fairly devoured hers.

He fully expected her to yield and draw closer to him, as so many others had done under that magnetic spell. To his surprise, she deliberately raised the dagger, and flourished it close to his face, while she said:

"I know thou liest, Lorenzo. Annetta has told me of all thy many loves. Tell me the truth, or I scratch thee, and thou knowest what that means. My cousin, Estella, is it not love for her that keeps thee near her?"

"No, by all the saints!" responded Don Lorenzo, fervently, and the glare of hatred in his eye confirmed his words. "If I told thee the truth about that, thou wouldst not ask me that question."

"Then tell me the truth," she said, coldly, withdrawing from him as she spoke; "we are near enough, my lord, to speak to each other. Keep your distance."

Something in her tone warned the Spaniard not to presume too much.

He took his seat in a chair, motioning to her to occupy the couch. She followed the motion, and asked:

"Well, my lord, what have you to say about your trip to the Adriatic, and your various adventures with the Countess Milleroni? What would you of her?"

"Vengeance!" answered Lorenzo, savagely, his eyes glowing. "She and her cursed Swiss

lover together thwarted me and humiliated me, and vengeance on both will I have. I began with him. Oh, Julia! I made him suffer yesterday. I fought him and wounded him sorely. And then, in his full view, I made love to his mistress, as he lay wounded in a poor fishing-smack. The fool took it to heart so much that he fled from Venice. That's why I took my trip to the Adriatic."

"Well, sir," continued the girl, coldly; "and what about the lady? What do you intend to do about her?"

"To make her love me," said Bellario, coolly, "and then to break her heart, and torture it as I tortured his."

"A wise plot, truly; and what is to hinder thee from learning to love her?"

"Thou!" said Don Lorenzo, softly, kneeling at her feet; "thy love alone, which passes all women's love, for thou, Julia, art the only woman that ever I loved or can love."

"You say truly," she observed, with a strange look out of her blue eyes, "I am the only woman you shall ever love again; and you shall love me as you never yet loved any woman, false and cruel one."

He looked doubtfully at this fragile little being, who spoke so mysteriously. But the strange girl suddenly bent forward and placed both hands on his shoulders.

"Lorenzo Bellario," she said, "we two are bad. One as bad as the other. We should be true to one another. Can you be true to me, forever?"

And she looked as though she would read his soul with her keen glance. He faltered a moment before those eyes.

"Why not?" he asked, at last.

"Listen," she answered, solemnly, "as long as you are true to me, I am true to you. I loved you first, and I thought you loved me, and me only. But I have seen Annetta since, and she has told me who you are. I knew then for the first time that you dared to approach me, Julia Dandolo, daughter of ten generations of princes, as a light o' love. Be it so, my lord. I forgive you the insolence, because I am a fool, for the love of your beautiful eyes. But be warned. Love me now, and love me wholly. Let not a thought of your heart go out toward another woman in Venice, or you will repent the moment before you are a day older. I know you, Don Lorenzo, thoroughly, and I hold you in the hollow of my hand. I love you very much, but I can hate you as you never were hated, if you make me jealous."

She looked into his eyes with such a deadly glitter in her own, that Don Lorenzo, bold as he generally was, shuddered slightly. This little, delicate, fair-haired girl, for one moment looked like a perfect fiend. The next she became the soft, melting angel, that twined her arms round his neck, and whispered:

"Dost thou love me, Lorenzo?"

He strained her to his breast, and pressed a fervent kiss on her lips. She returned the caress for a single instant, and then sprung away, laughing maliciously.

"And so Bonetta has left Venice, and the field is clear for Don Lorenzo to woo the beautiful countess?" she queried. "How his wooing would have sped if that naughty Julia had not come to spoil it! How my lord would have enjoyed the game, with his beautiful eyes languishing on the sweet countess, and—oh, I've a mind to kill you!"

She suddenly broke off, the very incarnation of jealous fury, her eyes darting flames of fire, the little dagger, so slight in appearance, so terrible in reality, convulsively clasped in her hand.

Don Lorenzo felt like a man with a dangerous serpent confined in his room, which he dared not approach.

Then her mood changed again, and she laughed as she continued:

"And so poor Bonetta corresponded with the Turk? How strange that two captains of Venice should do the same thing—is it not, Lorenzo?"

The Spaniard turned pale from some hidden cause.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"Daoud Pasha writes a great many letters," was the enigmatical answer; "I once saw a commission, filled out by him in the name of one—"

The Spaniard made but one bound to the corner of the room, where a small iron door opened into the wall. It was standing ajar.

He flung it open, and revealed a small cupboard, perfectly empty and bare of anything. Then he turned round, ghastly pale, his eyes flaming like torches, and leaped upon the slender figure of the girl-page with a fierce:

"Where are they? Hell's malison on thee! Where are they?"

She sprung back and struck at him with the dagger, with flashing eyes and the fury of a wildcat, and the Spaniard again recoiled before her.

"How dare you?" she cried, her little figure stiffened and erect, with presented weapon, the incarnation of angry repulsion—"how dare you speak to me like that?"

He suddenly altered his whole attitude, and sunk on his knees before her, with bowed head and clasped hands.

"Oh, Julia," he said, with beseeching eyes; "I yield to thee forever. Thou hast conquered me. Be merciful, for I am in thy power. Annetta has betrayed me."

She stood looking down at him, with heaving breast, for some minutes. Then she slowly sheathed her dagger.

"Don Lorenzo Bellario," she said, slowly, "you say true. Annetta has betrayed you. Women cannot be trampled on forever without turning at last. I have your papers safe. I promised Annetta to keep them for her safety. I know how long she would live, if you had her back here. Now open those doors, and mark my words. Let Annetta come to see me every day. Send her to me. I will see that you do not become too ardent in your pursuit of my excellent cousin, now that Bonetta is away. Poor Bonetta! How strange that he should correspond with Daoud Pasha, too!"

Don Lorenzo looked up at her. There seemed to be some hidden meaning in her words. But whatever it was, she did not explain herself.

"Open the door," she said, quietly; "you have angered me to-day, Don Lorenzo. See that you fail not at the window to-night. Then I shall know you are not with Estella."

"I will be there," he declared, humbly. "Ah, sweetest Julia! If I did not love thee so much, should I have let thee tyrannize over me as thou hast done?"

"I and my stiletto," she said, sarcastically; "give it its due weight, signor."

Don Lorenzo was kneeling close beside her as she said this. With a sudden movement, which she could not arrest, he clutched her wrist with one hand, while he passed his arm around her and seized the other arm from behind, holding her powerless in his iron gripe.

"Now, tigress," he said, with a grim smile, "will you betray me?"

She looked up at him, with the first natural look of love she had yet shown.

"Betray you, Lorenzo?" she said, softly; "I have saved you, foolish man!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, feeling her form quite limp in his arms, for she had ceased to struggle.

"That I have banished your foe," replied Julia. "You can have your revenge on Estella when you like. I will help you in it."

"Then what have you been doing all this time?" he asked, relaxing his grasp, in his astonishment.

"Fooling Don Lorenzo," she answered, suddenly springing away, and presenting her dagger, with a laugh.

Then, as suddenly, she sheathed it, and held out her hand, frankly.

"A truce, Lorenzo; we have played at cross-purposes long enough. Thou lovest me, and I love thee. We both hate Estella, and we will have our revenge. Annetta shall take my place from time to time, and I will be thy page, for I am a fool and I love thy beautiful eyes, in spite of all I know of thee."

The strange, whimsical creature threw her arms around him, and pressed her lips to those eyes she praised. Don Lorenzo looked at her with a long, yearning gaze, as he held her in his arms.

"Little witch!" he murmured, softly, with a sort of sigh; "thou hast done what never woman did before—made me love thee."

"I know it," she returned, with her peculiar, searching look; "but, oh, we shall both torture each other, for thou hast done the same to me."

He could not understand her meaning, and said so.

"Oh! you will know some day," she declared, shaking her bright curls; "but I know who will pay for all our tortures."

"Who?" he demanded, puzzled.

"Estella," she answered, savagely. "Her heart shall bleed a drop for every pang she costs my darling and me."

She kissed him in a strange, fierce way, and then leaped back.

"Open the doors," she ordered. "I would go forth."

Without a word, he obeyed her commands as if she had been a queen; and she flitted down the steps of the palace, as rapidly as she had come. Don Lorenzo saw her jump into the gondola, write something on the tablets she wore at her girdle, show it to the gondoliers, and move off toward the Dandolo palace.

Full of conflicting thoughts, the Spaniard returned to his room, and shut himself in alone, till long after dark.

CHAPTER XIII.

'COLA BOTTARMA'S PUPIL.

SIX months have passed since the day on which Don Lorenzo Bellario fought his duel on the Island of San Antonio, and since the disappearance of poor Captain Bonetta under attain of treason to the Venetian Republic.

During these six months the stranger, who went by the curious name of the "Slave of Love" in the city of Florence, had mended apace. He was a docile patient with the constitution of a horse, and his wound closed up inside of six weeks from his arrival at the house of Bottarma brothers.

From the day Guiseppe Bottarma pronounced his wounds healed, the stranger devoted himself with all his energy to obey the instructions of 'Cola the athlete. Cola Bottarma was the father of the science of fencing, the first man who showed Europe that shields might be dispensed with, and the sword be made a shield. He was also the inventor of "training," or rather its reviver, since the times of the gladiators.

He found in the stranger a docile pupil, who was content to run his daily round so many times, and carry little weights about, increasing daily, before he was allowed to touch a foil. He kept this huge skeleton close down to a limited diet of meat, with vinegar and water for his drink, eradicating the natural tendency of his frame to put on flesh, and hardening his muscles by the constant exercise he imposed.

Then he began to teach him to fence, beginning with the simplest thrusts and parries, till all the mysteries of *stoccada*, *imbrogliata*, *riposta*, etc., were gradually unfolded to him.

Day by day, the gaunt, weak skeleton, so slow in his movements, so languid from wounds, gathered his strength and progressed.

Two months from his arrival, he would exercise an hour at a time at light work.

In three months he was thrusting at a mark for dear life.

In four months he was fencing every day with 'Cola Bottarma, receiving many an unmerciful rap with the button of the foil.

In five months it took all 'Cola knew to hit him after a long rally.

In the sixth month he began to pass his master, and to hit him repeatedly from his great advantage in height and reach.

At last, one morning, the fencing-master, after a long bout, during which the other gave him two to one in hits, threw down his foil.

"Amore," he said, calling the other by the only name he knew him by, "do you remember what you asked me to do for you once?"

"To teach me to beat you," replied Schiavo d'Amore; "but I cannot do it yet. You let me hit you."

"You are wrong," protested the fencing-master; "you have learned more than you know. You had hight and strength before, but you were slow. Now you are as tough as steel, and as quick as a cat, while you have lost no strength but rather gained it. And you are the only man in Italy that can beat 'Cola Bottarma."

The stranger threw away his foil, and hugged the master in his arms.

"Now blessings on thy head, 'Cola!" he cried; "thou hast given me new life, ay, more than that. Thou hast given me vengeance on the only man in the world I hate, Don Lorenzo Bellario!"

"Bellario?" repeated Bottarma, curiously; "what has he done to thee?"

"He called me out on a trifle," answered the other, "and wounded me sorely. Well, that I could have forgiven. But after that he took advantage of my being away to steal my mistress from me, and flaunt his conquest in my face. Till then I was kind and good-natured to all the world. But as I fell back in the boat, and saw her I loved float by, singing gayly, in his arms, then I swore to punish that man for all his crimes to me and others, if it pleased God to let Antonio Bonetta live."

"Antonio Bonetta!" repeated Bottarma, eagerly; "is that your name?"

"Ay," said Bonetta, for it was he; "and what of it?"

"Only this," said the fencing-master, dryly;

"the hue and cry is out after thee, and a price is on thy head in Venice."

"For what?" asked Bonetta, surprised in turn.

"For treason, and correspondence with the Turk," said Bottarma; "had I known it was thee, I should have told thee long ago."

"It is a lie, a base, cowardly lie!" cried Bonetta, red with passion; "it comes from his hand, and to his heart will I pin the calumny when I get back."

"Be cautious," enjoined Bottarma, smiling.

"What, pupil? Can you keep your coolness in the swiftest rally, and lose temper at a lie? I heard the whole story from a Venetian pupil of mine, who has just arrived. One Count Lulli. It seems that the accusation against thee was put in the Lion's Mouth."

"Bellario, for a thousand!" cried the Swiss.

"Ay, but worse remains," persisted the fencing-master. "In thy pillow was found a letter from the Grand Turk, offering money to betray the Venetian fleet."

Bonetta was silent now for a minute.

"You are right, 'Cola," he said; "I must keep cool. I have a wary adversary. He must have put it there, with other proofs perhaps. I will be cautious. But to Venice I must go now, and hunt out this conspiracy, ay, if I have to tear it from Bellario's heart."

"Good luck to thee, my pupil," said the fencer, proudly; "of one thing thou art sure, that thy hand can keep thee now against any man in Italy."

"And it shall!" added the Swiss, solemnly, "for here I swear never to give up the pursuit, till I have exposed the wiles of the villain Bellario, righted my fair fame, and met him, hilt to hilt, in mortal combat."

And he looked capable of different things now, from the day when he left Venice.

His form, while less stout and imposing, was full of a tough sinewy strength that was far more formidable. Without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones, his face was so much altered from its thin outlines, and the long hair and beard, as to be quite unrecognizable. Bonetta was a different man from the silent, good-natured giant of the Swiss Guard. He had become a trained athlete, with his strength redoubled by the keen desire of vengeance.

Don Lorenzo Bellario may well look to himself when he comes after him.

CHAPTER XIV.

PULSING WAVELETS.

DON LORENZO BELLARIO and Estella, Countess Milleroni, were seated side by side in a gondola, floating over the still waters of the lagoon. They were alone, save for a single gondolier in the bow, whose back was discreetly turned, as he plied his oar.

Don Lorenzo was half seated, half reclining on his elbow, as he looked up in Estella's face, with the peculiar magnetic glance of his eyes that was so effective with the female sex. The countess had her eyes cast over the lagoon, glowing in the rays of the afternoon sun; but the flickering blush on her cheek told that she was quite sensible of the glance. She turned her eyes on the Spaniard presently, and blushed deeper than ever as she said:

"Don't look at me so. You frighten and disturb me."

He smiled with his own peculiar grace, with a look of ardent passion and triumph in his eyes, that made her lower her own.

"Frighten you?" he half whispered; "I would not do that with my good will. Disturb you? Not me, Estella, but your own heart, which is kinder to poor Lorenzo than its mistress would have it."

The countess erected her head with a haughty gesture.

"Its mistress can take care of it, my lord; Don Lorenzo has said the same things to scores of other ladies ere this, I doubt not."

A glance of anger shot from his eyes, and he clenched one hand as it lay beside him. Lorenzo had never met with such resistance before. For six long months he had laid siege to the countess, and he could count on nothing certain as yet.

"Estella," he said, in a tone of injury, "you are not kind nor just. Well do you know that since I first knew you, no other woman has claimed my vows."

"No other, Lorenzo?" and she turned her clear hazel eyes on his with a searching glance; "have you forgotten my cousin, Julia?"

"You know I never see her now," Bellario answered, hastily.

"You say true; poor Julia has changed wonderfully now. She is indeed ready to take the veil."

Don Lorenzo smiled covertly, as the countess turned away her head. He knew the secret of the religious fervor of the Doge's daughter. Annetta took her place, and played her part well, from their wonderful likeness to each other, while the counterfeit page enjoyed her liberty with all the zest of the real Julia.

"I can hardly think sometimes that it is the same Julia," pursued the countess. "She has turned away that sly-looking Father Ambrose with the sore eyes, and has submitted herself to Father Francis, stern as he is. She seems to have changed wonderfully."

Don Lorenzo yawned with an air of indifference.

"Heaven speed her conversion!" he exclaimed, piously. "Would that I could clear my own conscience from the sin of having, for a moment, disturbed her thoughts from the other world. Ah, Madonna Estella, how shall I ever atone to you for all my wild and wicked life? You will never know what it is to love hopelessly, as I have done so long. And it made me so wicked, only to divert my thoughts from her I adored, wildly and uselessly, then."

He spoke so sadly and sweetly, looked so handsome and so wretched, that involuntarily the countess put one hand on his glossy curls, and smoothed them with a gentle, pitying touch.

"Ah! Lorenzo!" she said, softly, "if I could but believe you!"

"Believe me?" he murmured, pressing his lips to her hand. "Look into my eyes, and then doubt me if you can."

She looked, and turned away with a deep blush, and then gazed out intently over the water, while he murmured words of glowing love, such as he knew so well how to use. Estella was yielding slowly to the spell she had resisted for so long, from some hidden motive, that even Lorenzo could not fathom.

Presently, as they floated quietly over the still lagoon, in the shimmering golden haze of afternoon, Bellario, with the tact of a master in the art, added the sweets of music to the enchantment of the scene, as the countess sat dreamily gazing seaward, her hand passively lying in his clasp.

Gently touching the lute that lay beside him, he sung, as softly as possible:

THE GONDOLA SONG.

Pulsing wavelets, softly lipping, kiss the gently-gliding keel;
Whispering breezes lift the silken-curtained canopy beside;
Seabirds, floating in the sunshine, over water blue as steel,
Circle in the heavens, watching dolphins leap above the tide.

Whispering, murmuring,
Moments swift fly,
Swift as the cloudlets
White-pluming the sky.

Over the sleeping sea softly we float,
Only young Love is awake in our boat.

He sung so enchantingly, with his sweet tenor voice, and the song was so well adapted to the scene, that Estella insensibly yielded to its influence. Her hand softly stole into his, and she turned her face, with a smile of pleasure that she could not resist, when the plash and roll of oars, close by them, suddenly disturbed the quiet of the sentimental idyl, while the bow gondolier, who had been nodding half asleep, over his oar, shouted out, as he plied it with desperate energy:

"Take care there! Do you want to run over us?"

The countess started up with a shriek, as a great galley came sweeping by them, almost running over them in its course, which was only altered just in time to graze the stern of their gondola.

Don Lorenzo leaped to his feet, and beheld the flag of the rival republic of Genoa floating in the stern of the stranger, beside which stood a tall, thin man, with a gray, pointed beard, and long gray hair, in the scarlet uniform of a captain in the Genoese service.

The Spaniard was within ten feet of the stern of the galley which kept so bad a look-out, and angrily called out to the gray-bearded captain:

"Signor, you are careless, too careless to be a gentleman. Do you understand me, or are you Genoese fools?"

The tall captain called out in answer:

"I understand, perfectly, signor. I anchor at the Dugano."

He raised his plumed hat with ceremonious courtesy, and turned away to con his vessel, as she swept on with dash and roll of oars.

The countess was looking after the galley with a strange, wistful look, and when Don Lo-

renzo turned and sat down, she seemed inattentive to his remarks, and still kept looking after the Genoese.

"Who is that?" she asked at last. "What brings the galleys of Genoa into these waters, Don Lorenzo?"

"It is some matter of business, I suppose," he responded, in an impatient tone. "The flag of Genoa is often seen here, while we are at peace with their republic. It is some little dispute about the coral fishers of the gulf, that demands a captain of the republic to settle it."

"But that officer," she persisted, tremulously. "Did not his voice remind you of any one?"

Bellarion started.

"Nay, now you say it, it does," he confessed, thoughtfully. "But, pshaw! the man's dead, or else fled to the Turk. What would he do in the service of Genoa? Besides, this is an old man."

"Then you knew the voice, too?" and she covered her face, with a shudder.

Don Lorenzo looked down with a face of bitter anger and mortification at her. He had been so accustomed to success, with his handsome person and many advantages, that it galled him to the soul to see this woman entirely oblivious of him, at the first sight of something that reminded her of the lover he had driven from Venice.

"Yes, I knew the voice," he declared, bitterly; "it was like the voice of that convicted traitor, Bonetta, whom I punished with my sword at San Antonio."

She started and looked up in surprise.

"You never told me that."

"No," he said, angrily; "and I am a fool to do it now. But it was this hand that stretched him bleeding in fair fight, for all that. He joined with you to humiliate me, and I took my revenge on him. But you have paid me back since then, by showing every moment that you care more for this banished traitor, with all his crimes, than for the love of him who never sued to woman before, in vain."

His tone was earnest and angry. For the first time, the all-conquering hero was piqued into showing his disappointment.

Estella looked at him, sadly and kindly.

"Ah, Lorenzo," she murmured, "our hearts are not our own always. If you love me truly, it will not be so for long. I feel my heart going toward you even now so strongly, and yet I fear so much to be deceived. As for him, I shall never see him again. A traitor mates not with the blood of the Dandolo. Now take me home. To-morrow I shall be able to speak to you. But now I hardly know what I am doing. My brain whirls."

He made a sign to the gondolier, who turned the boat's head shoreward, and they swept slowly in, past the picturesque dome of the Dugano, with the winged figure pointing seaward from its summit.

As they passed by, there lay the Genoese galley, with its sails furled and its oars stowed, the guards pacing up and down by the gangways. A group of Venetian officers were just taking leave of the captain, and the latter bowed to Don Lorenzo as he passed.

The Spaniard was very silent all the way home, and took leave of the lady at the gate of her palace, when he returned in haste to the Dugano to meet the captain of the galley. He found the boat of the latter awaiting him at the quay, and the first question he asked the officer in charge, was:

"What is your captain's name?"

"Count Bonetta," answered the officer, proudly. "If your name is Bellario, I have orders to take you on board."

Don Lorenzo bowed his head and stepped on board.

"It is he," he muttered.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GALLEY INTERVIEW.

WHEN Don Lorenzo stepped on the deck of the galley, he was surprised by the scrupulous neatness and order of everything on board. The long sweeps lay in rows side by side, with the ropes neatly coiled on top of them. The rowers were all below decks, and the only persons to be seen were the guard of halberdiers, in the scarlet uniform of the Genoese republic.

Don Lorenzo looked with surprise on the lofty figure of the captain. He had expected to meet his old opponent, but this was quite a different man, as far as he could see. The Swiss had been tall and heavily built, with a grave, quiet, good-natured face, and closely-trimmed fair hair and mustache. This man, while fully as tall, was thin to emaciation, with long hair and pointed beard of unmistakable gray, and a fierce, ea-

ger expression of countenance, the blue eyes being as keen as sabers.

"Well, signor?" queried the captain, haughtily. "What do you wish with me?"

Don Lorenzo still eyed him, doubtfully, and asked, with more politeness than he had ever shown a foe:

"May I ask your name, Signor Captain?"

"Antonio, Count Bonetta," said the other, as haughtily as before; "not the man you seek, signor, perhaps. That man died on the deck of the caravel that bore him from Venice. He had an uncle in the service of Genoa, and to him he committed the task to clear his memory from the lying accusations of one Lorenzo Bellario, in the city of Venice. I am come for that purpose, signor, with the credentials of St. George of Genoa at my back. They have gone to the Doge this day, and the memory of Antonio Bonetta is to be cleared by a fair trial in open day from the snares of the villain Bellario. Perhaps you know him, signor?"

He broke off with the sneering question, fixing his eyes on the Spaniard's, with ineffable insolence.

Don Lorenzo drew himself up haughtily.

"I am Bellario, Signor Count," he said; "and no man ever lived over twenty-four hours who called me by the name of villain. Make your will, signor, for by sunset the sands of San Antonio shall be red with the blood of a second Bonetta."

The count bowed with ironical courtesy.

"The second Bonetta will endeavor to avenge the first. I came to Venice to seek you."

"I am easily found," retorted Bellario, haughtily. "Your's will not be the first Swiss cock's comb I have cut."

"Boast not thyself too loudly," suggested the count; "we have no Lion's Mouth in Genoa, for traitors to put lying accusations therein, in the dark, as thou didst, to take away the fame of an honest soldier."

Don Lorenzo regarded the other for the first time with anger, mingled with astonishment.

"Swiss count!" he said, fiercely, "Lorenzo Bellario has done many a bad deed; but the man that says he ever did a cowardly one, lies like a coward. I whipped your fine nephew from Venice with my good sword, and he fled to avoid my sight, for I took his lady from him. What need had I to plot against the hound? For my own misdeeds I take all blame, but that I had no share in. When will you meet me, signor? It is not the custom of a Spanish grandee to bandy lies with a Swiss bravo."

"Go, get your friends quickly," answered the count, grimly; "when I see your boat pass me, my own will be in the water. Then lead on where you will."

"It is well," and the Spaniard bowed as he retired; "and if you take the advice of Don Lorenzo Bellario, Signor Count, you will leave instructions for your successor, for never yet found I the man that could cross swords with me, save only 'Cola Bottarna, of Florence.'"

The count bowed ceremoniously in reply.

"I will bear your recommendation in mind; and let me tell you one thing in turn, Signor Don Lorenzo: look to your guard well, for I fence close."

Bellarion laughed and descended into the boat.

"Within an hour of sunset expect me," he said, gayly; "I never let these things interfere with other engagements, and I have one with a sweet lady at nine of the clock."

The count turned away with a grim smile.

"Boast on," he muttered; "your turn is almost over now."

He watched the boat reach the quay, where Don Lorenzo sprang ashore. At the moment he did so, a slight figure in a page's dress, with long yellow curls like a girl's, sprung to the Spaniard's side, and appeared to be showing him something that hung from his girdle.

The count saw Don Lorenzo start and apparently ask some hurried question; and then the two went off at a rapid pace to the opposite side of the square, where the public gondolas lay in waiting.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAD PASSION.

WHEN the Spaniard was suddenly accosted, as we have said, he recognized his false page, the disguised princess. She was very pale, and clutched him by the arm, holding up to his sight the tablet hanging from her girdle, on which was written:

"Come with me. Great danger's afoot."

"What is it, Julia?" he demanded, in a low tone.

She made an imperious gesture for silence, and he remembered the dumb part she was playing.

She tapped the words, "Come with me" impatiently, and turned away across the square at a run, followed by Bellario, in doubt as to her meaning. Even his duel was forgotten for the moment.

She leaped into one of the public gondolas, and Don Lorenzo gave the word to his own palace, before the girl made any sign of communicativeness.

Then she commenced writing on the tablets, and finally held up before him the startling question at the moment:

"Where did you find Annetta?"

"She is the daughter of a fisherman of the Adriatic," he answered in a very low tone; "her parents are dead and she has been my dependent for many years."

Julia wrote again on her tablets and held up the still more startling answer:

"She is my half-sister!"

Bellarion fell back on the cushions and stared at her in amazement. She made him a sign of silence, and a few minutes afterward they arrived at the palace where the false page ran up the marble steps to the private cabinet at full speed.

Bellarion followed her and closed the doors behind him, till they were entirely alone.

Then he asked, wonderingly:

"What is all this, Julia? What do you tell me?"

"Listen," and she spoke rapidly; "I let you go out on the Lagoon alone with Estella to-day. I had need to see Annetta, to find out how my father was doing, and if he suspected anything. I had access to her as the page, and lo! my lady had suddenly changed. She pretended not to know who I was, and called me 'Annetta.'"

"Ha!" said Don Lorenzo, with a laugh; "I thought it would come to that. You would play with edged tools. Annetta has proved that she would not always be the fool you took her for. She knows you dare not expose her for fear of your own reputation. The convent or the grave would expiate the disgrace to Dandolo."

"What do you mean, signor?" she demanded, pale as ashes, and her eyes glittering ominously; "never has your hand touched mine save in courtesy; and I am now as pure as the day I first saw you. Dare you say otherwise?"

Her little teeth were clenched, and her hand closed on the poisoned dagger as she spoke, with the glare of an angry tigress in her eyes.

"Who will believe you?" said Don Lorenzo, with a faint sneer. "All the household know you as Annetta, the dumb page. You have acted your part well—ay, so well that they all think you what she was. And who shall gain-say them? Not I, my lady. We have lived with each other too long, and been alone too often. You have made me feel your power ever since you set yourself to torment me. Now you know what it is to be in the power of another. Good!"

And he clapped his hands. Julia looked dangerously at him, but controlled her passionate nature.

"Hear me out," she said, calmly; "I had not finished. After a while she relented so far as to tell me this secret, for she is a fool after all, this Annetta. She loves religion and wants to go into a convent, and that's the reason she does not wish to come back to doublet and hose. She hates you for your cruelty to her, and hopes for revenge. Ay, you may start. But she told me more than that. She told me how my father, thinking her to be me, told her how in former times he had a natural daughter, the child of a fisherman's wife, who was seven years older than I, and whom he had lost sight of. And then, by questioning him, she found that it was her own self, and then the idea entered her head to personate me forever, and thrust me down to her level."

"Therefore she told my father her own story, as of another, and how you stole away the fisherman's child to break her heart, and the old Doge swore an oath of vengeance against you, and to reclaim his daughter from her base position. Now, Don Lorenzo, who is in her power? Signor, she had found the papers!"

Don Lorenzo started back, as white as ashes.

"Heaven and earth!" he exclaimed; "you have betrayed me, devil that you are. And you pretended to love me!"

He sunk into a chair, shaking all over. The audacious duelist cowered down under some mysterious terror. The girl came close to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Nay, there at least you are wrong, Lorenzo," she said, sadly; "I have done much to tor-

ment you, but I have helped you to your revenge, not betrayed you. God help me! I love you. I hate those whom you hate, and I have destroyed them. But I had the papers hidden away in my own room, and she had found them."

"And where are they now?" he asked, eagerly. "Strange girl, something in your face tells me that the danger is averted."

Julia looked at him, fixedly. "God help me! It is," she said; "the papers are safe."

"Then what danger is afoot?" he asked, wondering.

"That the Doge will send for his daughter before the dawn of to-morrow," said Julia, solemnly; "and she will not be here."

"Where will she be?" asked he, wonderingly.

"In the palace of the Dandolo," answered the girl; "where she once lived happy, as the pure only can be."

"Julia! Julia!" he cried, suddenly catching her in his arms; "witch or fairy, devil or angel, you shall not leave me. With all thy torments, I love thee better than ten thousand Annetta's, and I will not have her back. Do you hear?"

Contrary to her usual wild pranks, the girl lay still in his arms, looking up in his face with a certain sad, far-away look in her blue eyes.

"Julia, my love, my life!" cried Don Lorenzo, ardently; "what meanest thou? Why wilt thou leave me? I will not have Annetta back for thee."

"Lorenzo," and she spoke solemnly; "Annetta will never come back."

"What!" he demanded, releasing her in his astonishment.

"Annetta is dead!" replied Julia.

Then there was a short, horrified pause. Even Don Lorenzo, hardened as he was, shuddered at the news.

"How did she die?" he at length demanded.

For all answer Julia drew from her bosom a packet of papers which she showed him, and pointed to a dark stain on the blade of her tiny dagger.

"I could not let any one keep those but me," she explained, with a strange attempt at a smile. "Sometimes—God help me!—I think I must be possessed of the Evil One, to torture what I love. And yet I cannot help it. Lorenzo, it is our last day together. To-morrow you must be far from Venice. In no other way can this crime be hidden. I did it to save you. Annetta must never be found, and I must be the Doge's daughter once more."

"If you will go with me, I go," he answered, obstinately. "Let nothing part us now. I swear I will not stir without you, for I love you."

At this moment the great bell of St. Mark's tolled out five, and Don Lorenzo started.

"The very hour!" he said, hurriedly snatching up cap and rapier; "I shall be too late, and the cursed Swiss will have a right to taunt me for it."

"What is it? A duel? Another?" cried the girl, aghast.

"Ay, Julia," he answered, rapidly girding himself; "with Bonetta's uncle, and I have no second. How shall I find one in time?"

"Take me!" cried the girl, tossing her curls back; "it is our last day, and I will play the page for once to my heart's content. Come, Lorenzo."

He strained her to his breast, and rained kisses on her brow and lips.

"My queen!" he ejaculated; "now by all the stars of heaven, there is none like thee, and I love thee more than all the world beside. We will go."

Cavalier and page passed forth to the rendezvous for the duel with Count Bonetta.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VENGEANCE THAT CAME.

COUNT BONETTA stood on the quarter-deck of his galley, with a group of officers round him, watching the passing gondolas, plying to and from the shore. The clock of St. Mark's had tolled five, and the captain's barge lay alongside the galley.

The count seemed to be impatient, as he watched boat after boat, and still not the one he expected.

At last, just as he was giving utterance to his anger, a large gondola, with two gondoliers in livery of purple and gold, came skimming out of the Grand Canal, and shot across the forefoot of the galley. At the entrance of the low, black cabin stood Don Lorenzo Bellario, in his most brilliant dress of white, slashed with gold,

and beside him was the slight figure of the fair-haired page, in violet velvet.

Don Lorenzo raised his plumed cap as he passed and pointed seaward toward the island of San Antonio.

The count ordered his boat round, stepped into it, and rowed away on the track of the swift gondola at an easy pace, following in its wake, accompanied by two officers.

So the two boats proceeded for a little distance, when the steersman of the Genoese captain's barge remarked to his leader:

"My lord, there is a gondola following us."

The count turned round and looked back. The lofty prow of a gondola, standing up in front of the low, funereal-looking black cabin, was indeed moving slowly in his wake.

"It is some other party on a similar excursion to our own, perhaps," he suggested, with a grim smile; "such pleasure-parties are not uncommon here. Let us hasten on. Give way, men. Double the stroke."

The rowers bent to their oars, and the barge moved rapidly off on the track of the foremost gondola.

The gondoliers redoubled their efforts to keep the lead, and the two boats rapidly approached the island of San Antonio. The rear gondola did not seem to be actuated by such haste, for it fell astern as soon as they commenced the race, and was a mere speck on the water by the time the island was reached and rounded.

Don Lorenzo and the pretty page sprung ashore, hand in hand, and at once started for the well-known rendezvous of the duelists. The tide was down, and the broad, firm beach was smooth and elastic to the feet, giving promise of good holding ground.

Count Bonetta and his officers followed, the two boats lying side by side on the beach.

When they came to the well-known place, Don Lorenzo turned and awaited the Genoese with a gay greeting.

"Well, gentlemen," he said; "you see we Venetians have a sweet place to settle our little difficulties. Nothing to see us but the sea-gulls, and the ocean breeze soon covers the dead with sands. I remember leaving five tall fellows, with their faces to the sky, in this very spot."

"Take thy leave of the place now, then," said the deep voice of Count Bonetta; "for before the sun sets thou shalt be with them."

Don Lorenzo laughed sardonically.

"Your nephew was one of them, count," he retorted, carelessly; "I peppered him finely, I warrant you, and now we shall try to put his venerable uncle in pickle."

Without another word, the Genoese commenced to take off his upper garments, handing cloak and doublet to his seconds.

Don Lorenzo smiled and laid his own delicate garments on one of the benches. As he did so, he noticed Julia very pale.

"Lorenzo," she whispered, "who is that man?"

"Count Bonetta, uncle to the Swiss pig that I pinked just six months ago," was Don Lorenzo's careless reply.

"It is himself," she whispered, anxiously; "do you not know his voice? I tell you it is he."

"Whoever he be," declared Don Lorenzo, with fierce energy, as he turned round and surveyed the grizzled beard of the other, "he shall never come back to threaten me a second time. This time I kill him. Watch me."

"Oh! be cautious, Lorenzo," she enjoined, in tones of agony; "there is something in that man's eye that tells me he is sure of victory. And if you are killed, I die, too."

"Nonsense, carina," he said, playfully; "this is my twenty-ninth duel, and I never was scratched. Good-by till after the fight."

He turned away and tripped toward his antagonist with a light, airy step, throwing his cap down on the bench as he did so. Gloriously handsome as Apollo, with a vivid freshness of color that no marble Apollo ever boasted, his glossy curls waving in the sea-breeze, his eyes sparkling bright and fierce, he waved his slight rapier in the air with a gay flourish, and said:

"On guard, Signor Bonetta."

The Genoese captain remained standing, leaning on his rapier, and spoke in his deep, sad voice:

"Don Lorenzo Bellario, do you remember this day, six months ago?"

"I do," said the other, scornfully; "and I know you now as then, Antonio Bonetta. To your guard."

"You do not know one thing," answered Bonetta, quietly; "I am safe here under the flag of Genoa, having entered her service. And moreover, I have spent nearly six months in the house of Cola Bottarma, in Florence. My

hair is gray, but who turned it gray in one night? Who seared my heart, with his diabolical cruelty to one who meant no harm to him? Don Lorenzo Bellario, betake you to your guard, and God have mercy on your soul."

He spoke the last words with the solemnity of a judge pronouncing sentence on a criminal, and in spite of his iron nerves, Bellario shuddered involuntarily.

Bonetta raised the light rapier in his hand, and the weapons crossed with a clash.

At the sound Don Lorenzo started and smiled fiercely. He was used to the clashing of swords.

Then, with all the resources of skill and activity he possessed, he attacked the Swiss.

The latter stood as firm as a rock, his stern blue eyes looking down on the other, while his arm and wrist, as firm as a bronze statue's, extended his point, always close to the other's body.

He hardly seemed to move, so small were the circles described by his rapier; but three times, while Don Lorenzo was circling round, with *appel*, feint, thrust and *glizade*, he found the point of Bonetta dropped close to his shoulder, as he made a low lunge, pricking him back with the warning stop-thrust.*

Three times did the point pierce his shoulder, just enough to draw blood, Bonetta remaining on the defensive, with a grim smile of contempt that enraged Don Lorenzo inexpressibly. The Swiss had not even extended himself, and yet the Spaniard had been compelled to leap back three times to avoid a deeper wound.

He withdrew himself out of distance at last, and stood on the defensive, a little breathed with the violent exertions he had made.

"Is that all you know?" cried Bonetta, contempt in his tone. "Cola Bottarma told me you would never make a good fencer. Guard this."

And he gave a sudden, nervous beat on the other's blade, and lunged forth so straight, swift and strong that only the other's being a little out of distance saved him from being run through the body. Bonetta's hand was as high as his head, and the thrust was sent in above the Spaniard's guard, the keen point just drawing the blood from Bellario's breast.

Don Lorenzo leaped back, with a look of fear for the first time on his face.

That single thrust revealed to him that he had met his master; and he had been compelled to give so much ground that his return was out of distance.

Bonetta laughed as he beat aside the ineffectual blade, stamped his foot and resumed his guard. A look of caution and apprehension was on the face of his enemy.

"Come, Don Lorenzo," he said, sneeringly; "those five tall fellows were not much after all. Why don't you attack?"

But Don Lorenzo merely shook with his head, a faint attempt at his old provoking look. His face was pale, and his brows set into an anxious but resolute frown. There was not a drop of cur's blood in the veins of Lorenzo Bellario; and he seemed to have resolved to die game, though he knew the other to be his master.

"You will not attack?" asked Bonetta. "Then I must. Now look to yourself."

As he spoke he advanced within distance, his body vibrating backward and forward with the threatening motion that portends an attack, his blade quivering and grating against Bellario's, his eyes sternly bent on the other's eyes, with a fierce, unwinking stare.

Clash!

There was a sudden beat on Lorenzo's rapier, and one more of those terrible, strong, straight lunges, like the charge of a bull. It pierced the Spaniard's guard, tore his shirt, and penetrated his breast about half an inch, as he gave a desperate leap backward. Before he could recover Bonetta had sprung forward and directed another of those lunges, as firm and as impossible to ward as the other. Another frantic leap backward saved the Spaniard from more than a third slight wound in the breast, but he was so confused with his violent exertions, that he tripped and fell on the sand at the mercy of his opponent.

Bonetta drew back his sword and rested it on the sand.

"Rise, signor," he exclaimed. "Our quarrel is mortal, but Antonio Bonetta seeks no advantage."

Don Lorenzo slowly rose and leaned on his

*Stop-thrust, or *coup d'arret*. In fencing, if the adversary makes a low thrust at the body, he exposes the upper part of his body to the stop-thrust, which will reach him before his own can touch the body of his opponent.

weapon. He was deadly pale, shaking all over from exhaustion, and his white shirt was stained in five different places with little red spots of blood.

His eyes burned with unutterable hatred, with a certain hopeless despairing look in their dark depths that told that he knew his hour was come.

"You have the turn now," he whispered, showing his white teeth under the black musache in a savage grin; "but I have one satisfaction, at least: *the countess is mine!*"

He leaped on Bonetta, as he said the last words, and attacked him with a reckless ferocity that compelled even the practiced fencer to recoil a step. He was quite careless of his defense, confining himself to desperate lunges, and trying to catch Bonetta's point with his left hand in his despairing effort for revenge.

The latter retreated, circling round the frantic Spaniard, his point playing incessantly, the fatal stop-thrust drawing Bellario's blood from several slight wounds, that slowly drained his strength away, with pitiless skill.

The stern, set look never left the face of the Swiss, as he watched his enemy growing weaker and weaker, from pure exhaustion. At last Don Lorenzo paused and leaned on his sword, and Bonetta spoke:

"Now, Don Lorenzo Bellario, you are at my mercy. Now confess your treason and you shall receive your life. Confess that you put the accusation against me in the Lion's Mouth, or die!"

Bellario was trembling all over with weakness, but he straightened up once more, and faintly raised his sword.

"Kill me, signor," he muttered hoarsely; "I know nothing of your accusation. Kill me, but do not dishonor me."

Bonetta ground his teeth with a furious curse.

"Then die in your falsehood!" he shouted, and made his last fierce lunge, that beat aside the Spaniard's guard and pierced deep into his body.

Don Lorenzo sunk slowly back on the sand, his sword falling from his nerveless hand, while his face looked up, proud and defiant to the last, at his triumphant enemy.

Hardly had he done so, when, with a wild, despairing shriek, the disguised page ran forward and threw herself on his body, crying:

"Lorenzo! Lorenzo! My love, my life! He has killed him."

Then there was a sensation among the Genoese officers.

At the sound of that shriek Bonetta dropped his sword, stared at the golden curls as if thunderstruck, and ejaculated:

"The princess Julia! Holy Mother of Heaven! The villain has bewitched her, too."

And a frown of intense pain and hatred crossed his iron features, as he gazed at his fallen foe, beautiful as ever amid all his blood, and heard the frantic girl calling on him to speak to her only one word, while she kissed the pale lips from which no answer came.

The other officers hung around, helpless and sympathetic, not knowing what to do, and Don Lorenzo lay slowly breathing away his life in the arms of Julia, when the sound of voices close by aroused everybody to the fact of strangers being present.

A brilliant crowd of cavaliers and nobles came trooping into the little arena, and within ten feet of Bonetta, with eyes distended with horror, stood Estella, the Countess Milleroni.

The cuirasses of the Swiss halberdiers of the guard were behind and around her, and on her right hand was an old noble in robes of black velvet, furred with sable, who was crowned with the ermine cap of a senator of the Republic of Venice.

Bonetta stood gazing blankly before him at the countess. He had no eyes for any one else.

She, on her part, looked at him with amazement and terror. There was no mistake with her. The suddenly gray hair and the thin face could not hide her lover from Estella Milleroni. She knew him in an instant. But as she glanced from him to the pale, bleeding figure of Don Lorenzo, a look of fear and aversion gathered on her face, and she turned away with a shudder.

A keen spasm of pain crossed Bonetta's countenance when he beheld that look. And then the old senator advanced and addressed him.

"You are Antonio Bonetta, formerly captain in the service of Venice," he said, more affirmatively than inquiringly.

"I am Antonio Count Bonetta, in the service of Genoa," admitted the other, proudly,

"You were in the service of Venice," continued the senator, sternly. "Where is your discharge?"

"I have none," replied Bonetta. "I am a free Swiss and need none."

The senator turned and made a signal to the halberdiers behind. An officer advanced and laid his hand on Bonetta's shoulder.

"You are my prisoner, captain," he announced, stiffly.

Bonetta bowed, and quietly took his clothes from the hands of his seconds, as he protested:

"I yield to force, but the Eagle of Genoa shall yet teach the Lion of St. Mark to respect her servants."

The senator made a mute sign, and a guard of halberdiers surrounded the Genoese officers, who could not have resisted had they wished. But they followed the example of their leader, and submitted in silence.

Then the old noble pointed to Don Lorenzo, and to the disguised page, who lay with her face hidden under her long curls, quite mute since the advent of this crowd.

"Take up yonder boy," he ordered, sternly. "Guard the young viper well. He has murdered the princess, Julia Dandolo. If the man is alive, bring him along to the boats, and then follow."

A stiff-looking Swiss marched forward, seized the seeming boy by the arm, and jerked him roughly to his feet. As he did so, and the false page's face was turned round to view, deathly pale, framed in golden ringlets, Estella sprang forward with a scream of recognition. "Madonna mia!" she cried. "Count Faliero, it is Julia herself!"

The old count was completely taken aback. He rubbed his eyes, looked at the half-fainting princess, whom he instantly recognized, and for a moment was at fault. But his Italian subtlety at once conceived two things—a mystery to be solved, a scandal to be hushed up.

"Take care of her, madonna," he whispered to Estella. "This must be settled in secret council."

Then aloud: "Halberdiers, put yon wounded man in a litter, and bring him after us. When we reach the city, keep back the people, and take him round by the private entrance of the palace. Come, my lord count."

He bowed to Bonetta with formal politeness. The affair had assumed a different aspect since the mixing up of so high a family.

In ten minutes more five gondolas were bearing back the party to Venice, three of which had followed the boat of Bonetta in the wake of that mysterious boat that had excited the curiosity of the Genoese steersman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF ALL.

A GLOOMY picture was presented, some hours later, by the Secret Hall of the Council of Three.

This was the last dread tribunal of Venice, above even the better known Council of Ten.

Its sittings were held in secret. Judges and attendants were alike habited in black, and sworn to secrecy on all points.

In a deep, vaulted hall, or rather dungeon, built in the foundations of the ducal palace, the meeting was held. The massive stone arches, and great slabs of pavement, were faintly illumined by the light of several swinging lamps, that hung from iron rings in the ceiling. The atmosphere was cold and damp, for the hall was below sea level, and the soaking waters were only kept out by the tough hydraulic cement.

On one side of an oval stone table were three great chairs or thrones, also of stone, and in these sat three silent figures, draped from head to foot in black robes and in deep shadow.

On the table, extended on a pallet, lay Don Lorenzo Bellario, pale as a corpse, but still with his eyes open, and able to breathe faintly. His wounds were all neatly bandaged. Standing before the table was Antonio Bonetta, in full Genoese uniform, but with his hands fettered. Next to him was the false page, the princess Julia, and she also was fettered. Then there was a chair.

Seated in that chair, and cold and rigid, was the dead body of the ill-starred Annetta, who had assumed the role of princess, to meet her death from the hand of her sister.

Then there was a circle of black, silent figures in long robes, who bore in their hands naked swords; the familiars.

The room was still as death, till the judge, who sat on the middle throne, asked, in a deep, tremulous voice:

"Are the prisoners here?"

"Ay, my lord!" answered one of the dark familiars out of the shadow.

"Name them."

The familiar advanced and called out:

"Don Lorenzo Bellario."

"Here!" was the faint response from the table.

"Captain Bonetta."

"Count Bonetta, of the service of Genoa," corrected the Swiss officer, in a defiant manner.

"Annetta, page and mistress," continued the official, quite regardless of the interruption.

There was no response. The question was repeated.

"Dead!" answered a low voice, that of the false page.

The judge in the center started, and threw back the cowl from his head. Then one could see that it was the blind Doge himself.

"Who spoke?" he demanded, in a trembling voice.

The judge on his right caught him by the sleeve, and whispered for some moments in his ear. When he had finished, the old man bowed his face on his hands, and appeared to be greatly agitated. Presently he raised his head and said, in a broken voice:

"It is just. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. Read the accusation against Captain Bonetta."

At a sign from the silent judge the familiar read, in a monotonous voice:

"Antonio Bonetta, captain of the Swiss Guards of the State of Venice, is accused, out of the Lion's Mouth, of conspiring to deliver the fleets of Venice into the power of the Turk. A letter from the vizier of the Grand Turk was found concealed in the bolster of the said Captain Bonetta, at his quarters in the Swiss barracks by the arsenal, alluding to a previous demand for money on the part of said Captain Bonetta, for services to be rendered by him, and consenting thereto. The said Captain Bonetta is also accused of deserting the service of Venice without leave, and fleeing to foreign parts to escape the punishment of treason to the republic, on the day of the accusation from the Lion's Mouth."

"Antonio Bonetta," said the deep, tremulous voice of the old Doge, "what have you to say to this?"

Bonetta raised his head proudly.

"For the desertion," he answered, "I say *Not Guilty*. I sent in my resignation to the commander of my battalion before I left the city. It is a custom among the free Swiss to do so, if it shall seem good to them. I owe no fealty to Venice, since I signed my name to that paper. Send to the commandant, and you will find it is so."

One of the cowed judges made a rapid sign, and a familiar glided from the room. The Doge looked as if perplexed, as he asked:

"And what ailed thee in Venice, Bonetta, that thou shouldst leave it? Were we not kind to thee?"

Bonetta's voice trembled for the first time.

"Most kind, my lord," he said. "Too kind to the humble soldier of fortune. Man could not have been happier than I till the fatal day that man crossed my path."

And he pointed to Don Lorenzo, who smiled faintly, with a strange, derisive smile.

"My lords," he continued, "of the charge of correspondence with the Turk, I am innocent. The man who put the accusation into the Lion's Mouth doubtless hid the letter in my room. I accuse Don Lorenzo Bellario of being the man who did both, and I call on you to compare the writing of the two letters with those of any undoubted letters of his that you can find."

Again Don Lorenzo smiled. The Doge answered, in a sad tone:

"Would that we could believe thy tale, Bonetta. But the letter was recognized by the council as being written by the vizier himself."

"Then God help the cause of truth!" said the Swiss, "for I cannot understand it."

"What was thy reason for leaving Venice then?" asked one of the judges, sharply. "Tell us the truth, mind, for the rack lies in the next room."

Bonetta drew himself up haughtily.

"It needs no rack to make a Swiss speak truth, my lord," he said. "I left Venice, badly wounded in a duel by Don Lorenzo Bellario. He picked a quarrel with me to avenge my having prevented, along with a noble lady, his abduction of the princess, Julia Dandolo, daughter to my lord, the Doge. He wounded me, and left me, as he thought, for dead. I was picked up by a fisherman, and taken home across the bay. And then, my lords, a gay barge passed me, with music and mirth, and I saw my betrothed bride therein, while I lay at

death's door; and Don Lorenzo's arm was round her, my lords, while she, false, perjured one, sung with him a gay love song, and I not twenty feet off. My lords, the heart that Lorenzo's rapier spared was wrenched in twain by the jeweled fingers of a woman. Do with me what you will. I have had my vengeance at last on him. All the rest is gall and ashes now."

There was a deep silence as he ended his bitter speech. It was broken by a stifled sob from the shadow where the familiars stood.

Then the cold, passionless voice of the cowed judge said:

"And you left Venice for a cross in love?"
"I left Venice for vengeance, my lord," said Bonetta, grimly. "The trodden worm became a serpent with a sting. I went to Florence, and learned all the mysteries of fence with Cola Bottarma. I swore to come back and punish Don Lorenzo. Then, suddenly I heard that the hue and cry was out against me, for treason to Venice—I, who had periled my life so often for her against the Turk. Then I went to Genoa, and told my story to the council, and they took me with open arms to their service. They have no Lion's Mouth in Genoa to slander brave soldiers behind their backs. I came back, and the first man I saw was this same Don Lorenzo, and with him her, the false one. I insulted him with a purpose, fought him down, and now there he lies—curse him forever! triumphant even now, that he has robbed me of my only love."

There was a sudden commotion among the dark familiars. One of them dropped the naked sword to the ground with a clash, rushed forward, before any one could stir, and threw back the black hood from her head, revealing the lovely face of Estella Milleroni, suffused with tears!

She fell on her knees at Bonetta's feet and seized his hands, manacled before him, covering them with kisses and tears.

"Antonio, my lord, my love!" she cried; "it is thee, indeed. Oh! forgive me that I doubted thee, and kill me."

But the judges rose with one accord at this interruption.

"The Countess Milleroni!" exclaimed one; "how came she here?"

"I will tell you, my lords," answered the lady, boldly; "I came in disguised as you see, with the order of one of your noble selves. Had it not been for me, Count Bonetta would not be in your hands. I suspected the duel, and gave you the information that led to his capture, because I wished him to have a fair trial, as was promised me by two of your noble selves. And now I tell all the world my belief that he is innocent, and I crave his pardon on my knees, martyr that he is, for doubting him on the evidence of yonder dying traitor."

There was a movement of distrust among the judges. One of them threw back his cowl, disclosing the features of Count Foscari.

"Falcio," he said, bitterly, in a low tone, "it is you who have betrayed our secrets to this woman."

"Hush!" replied the other, apart; "we can afford to be just for once. Here comes the messenger."

The three judges sunk back on their seats, as the familiar entered the room with a large letter, which he handed to Count Falcio. The latter broke it open and handed it to Foscari triumphantly, saying:

"The captain's story is true. Here is his resignation."

Count Foscari looked it over, and nodded impatiently.

"Well, well," he said; "so far, so good. But the letter from the vizier remains to be accounted for."

There was an awkward silence. Bonetta stood looking at the countess, hope, fear, doubt, love, and bitterly lacerated feeling, struggling together in his rugged face. She, on her part, was weeping softly, kissing those fettered hands, and regarding him with inexpressible penitence and love.

Julia Dandolo had been standing with downcast head, silent and apparently sullen, during the whole of the proceedings. Suddenly she raised her head and said, in a strangely low, hushed tone:

"I can account for it, my lords."

There was a pause of utter astonishment. Even Don Lorenzo turned his head with a look of wonder.

"You?" he muttered, faintly.

"My lords," said the disguised princess, firmly, "we are all of one family here. Let the familiars go forth and keep the doors, for what I say concerns the honor of Venice."

There was a hurried, whispered consultation

among the judges. Then Falcio motioned to the familiars to retire, in obedience to the mandate.

In a few moments more they heard the heavy bronze doors at the head of the winding stone stairs clang to with a dull roar, and they knew that they were alone.

Then, and not till then, the black-robed judges descended from their seats, and the blind Doge hurriedly inquired:

"Julia! Julia! is it really thee, my daughter? Oh! what hast thou done? Who is it that took thy place to deceive the blind old man?"

"My father," answered the girl, holding out her manacled hands for him to feel, "is it fit that a daughter of Dandolo should be chained like a felon?"

"Who chained her?" demanded the old man, furiously gazing round with his sightless eyes. "Who dared to chain my daughter? Unlock those fetters instantly! Count Foscari, this is your work, I know."

Count Foscari hurriedly unlocked the fetters without a word, and the old Doge folded his arms around his child, saying in a broken voice, with wandering manner:

"I know all, my child. The fisherman's daughter it was that thou slewest. They shall not harm thee while I live, Julia. They shall not take my child from me."

The girl turned paler than ever, as she saw the mere wreck that remained of her father.

"Let us be just, father," she said, softly; "I have wronged a brave man, and I must make reparation, for the honor of Dandolo."

"The honor of Dandolo!" and the blind Doge stood up as straight as a soldier on parade; "say on, my daughter."

Then, in the midst of a deep silence, Julia spoke, every ear hanging on her words.

"Captain Bonetta is innocent," she said. "The letter was put into his room. Remove his fetters."

Count Falcio unlocked the fetters of the Swiss with a snap.

"Who put the letters in his room?" demanded Foscari, in his sharp, suspicious tone.

"I did!" said Julia, calmly.

There was a general start.

"You?" exclaimed several voices.

"Myself," said the girl, calmly; "I put the letter into the Lion's Mouth, and the other into Captain Bonetta's bed."

"But, Julia," interrupted the old Doge, querulously, "how could you do that, when you were kept at home in our palace all the time?"

She sighed and smiled at once.

"Ah! how safe these fathers think us! They put governors and nurses over us, and fancy that the young bird will never learn to use its wings. Ah! my father, so it was, till one day a bright cavalier came floating by in his gondola, and he sung so sweetly that I became his slave forever. And this cavalier was a wicked man, and he had for a page a fair-haired girl, who was wondrously like me. And so the caged bird longed to be free and try her wings. And the poor wild bird had been shot at and snared by the wicked fowler with the beautiful eyes; she longed for the quiet and safety of the cage. So, to make it short, I, the princess, doffed robe and train, and donned the silk hose and velvet doublet of the saucy page. And then I flew to the beautiful, wicked fowler, and lo! he had been injured by another, Captain Bonetta. So I avenged him on his enemy, and drove Bonetta from Venice. And now he has come back and killed my love."

She suddenly broke out with wild, passionate weeping, and flung her arms around the neck of the wounded man, kissing his pale face with desperate love.

"And I tortured him while I loved him," she cried, "and now Heaven takes him from me to avenge the crime."

Don Lorenzo raised his left arm, the only one that was capable of use, and drew her close to him, murmuring:

"We will die together, love."

"Ay!" she cried, suddenly, starting up and confronting the rest with a glowing face; "we will defy you all in death, Doge, who would not let us love each other, council who would kill him, if they knew all, and officious meddlers yonder, who have been punished rightly. Listen! Do you know to whom that letter was addressed that was found in Bonetta's bed?"

"To Captain Bellario."

"Fools of council! that had ten thousand spies at work, and could not find these."

As she spoke, she drew from her bosom a bundle of parchments, and threw them down, one by one, at the feet of Count Foscari, with a shrill laugh, crying:

"There! the first letter to Captain Bellario, under Admiral Milleroni, offering him a hundred thousand ducats to betray the fleet. There! the commission of admiral from the Turk. There! the receipt for the money received. And there the patent of the order of St. Mark. My hero! My love! He cheated the Turk; and, instead of delivering the fleet into their hands, he gained a glorious victory for you, ungrateful dogs! And yet, if ye had known of this correspondence, nothing could have saved him from the block. And now he is dying. The meddlesome fool who first tried to part us has triumphed at last, and slain my love, and I have slain my sister. I did it in passion, not meaning to kill her, but the dagger was poisoned. Therefore, I must die, to appease the laws of Venice. And now, father, I charge you, if ever you loved me, to bury me beside the man I have loved and tortured, and to write on my tomb only these words: 'She died a maiden.'"

Awed by her wild words, no one stirred a finger, when she turned again to Don Lorenzo and threw herself on his body, pressing her lips to his in a last kiss.

A little shudder passed through both, and all was still.

"She has slain herself and him," said the deep voice of Captain Bonetta, and he pointed to the two white faces.

It was indeed so.

They found a small vial of deadly poison broken between her teeth in that last kiss of death, and the two strange beings had gone to their long account together.

There is but little more to tell.

The story was hushed up, and the funeral of the princess, closely followed by that of her father, from grief at her loss, excited only the sorrow of the multitude at her early death.

Bonetta and Estella Milleroni were united, after all their trials, and the captain became a famous admiral in the service of Genoa, for he never revisited Venice.

Poor wronged Annetta, the innocent sufferer of all, rests under a slab in Saint Mark's cathedral, under the style and title of the Princess Julia.

Few ever guess, when they press the green sod that marks a little grave in the Strangers' Field, that beneath them lie the dust of beautiful, wicked Lorenzo Bellario, and his erring love, the Doge's daughter.

THE END.

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